Book review


This is a beautifully produced book; well bound, good quality paper, pleasing typeface, and excellent layout. It differs from other review volumes—in addition to 'standard' commissioned review articles a large selection of references from many journals has been grouped into topics and a short résumé of each set of papers has been provided by one of the associate editors. One might expect such a wide coverage to be sketchy, but the whole volume is large enough to be very comprehensive.

However, although the Preface suggests that this might be the first of a biennial venture and claims that the literature review covers the last two years, this is sadly not true. By the time the book has hit the shops—1985—no reference is later than 1983 and many date back five years or more. Though this allows a broad perspective, to be always two years behind is a fairly serious problem for a supposedly current review.

Nonetheless I enjoyed two articles; John Decker's own, very readable one on treatment in rheumatoid arthritis and Hunder and Hall's article on disease classification, referring among others to three papers on juvenile arthritis which I had missed and will be getting my librarian to copy. Several other references in various topic groups had already passed me by. I admit to skimming the long systemic lupus erythematosus section, partly because it was so awfully boring and partly because having only seen one patient with the disease last year I couldn't really get up any feeling of need.

Now rheumatologists world wide receive a bimonthly digest from CML, circulated under sponsorship, identical in concept to this compendium, and with the same team of associate editors. Do we need the compendium as well? Frankly I don't think the format works in the large book; it is too dated and too indigestible. Whereas the bimonthly version can be quickly enjoyed, the book demands a certain dedication, like homework. I am told that it may also be distributed free, courtesy of the pharmaceutical industry and would be an elegant addition to a unit library but I doubt if it would be opened very often. It is too specialised for most postgraduate centre libraries and in these straightened times I can think of better buys.

Consultant Rheumatologist,
Brook General Hospital,
London SE18.

Andrew Bam.