

gently with the nature of immunity, the historical background, and the cardinal features of immune responses. The immune system is then described concisely but with considerable detail in eight chapters covering antigens, the HLA system, immunoglobulins, complement, and the relevant cell populations—namely, lymphocytes, mononuclear phagocytes, granulocytes, and killer cells. The second section, headed 'Immunopathology and transplantation' contains six chapters on allergy and autoimmunity, mechanisms of immunological tissue damage, immunodeficiency and lymphoproliferative disease, transplantation, and finally HLA and disease. Each chapter ends with a few recommendations for further reading from recent review articles, a good selection of textbooks, and relevant original papers.

This is undoubtedly a first class update or introduction to immunology for anyone with a medical or biological sciences background. The emphasis is on basic mechanisms and concepts in immunology, which are clearly described and then illustrated with examples. These examples include the consequences of infectious diseases in man, clinical immunological abnormalities in humans, and occasionally, a pertinent animal experiment. The book is mainly factual and instructive: any theories such as those on induction of autoimmune responses and clonal selection are described briefly and clearly. There are some gaps in information, inevitable in a compact book attempting to cover a huge field. For example, monoclonal antibodies since their advent in 1975 have been used extensively in all areas of immunology. They are referred to in passing, but methods for their production and their widespread applications are not mentioned. Immunological methodology can help the reader to understand mechanisms and concepts, as is well illustrated at the end of the chapter on immunoglobulins, and references to other immunological methods could be helpful.

Overall, the presentation of information in this book is excellent, succinct, and didactic. The book is, despite the density of facts, immensely readable. Immunological jargon is avoided and each new term is introduced in heavy type in place of a glossary. The diagrams are simple and easy to follow. (My favourite is the cartoon which illustrates immunological relationships.) The facts are as up to date as one can possibly expect in an expanding field. Rheumatologists will find the chapter on autoimmunity is brief but to the point, and other chapters on immunopathological mechanisms are highly relevant. For £8.50 the book is exceedingly good value.

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Back Pain: The Facts. 2nd Edn. By MIV Jayson, Pp. 177. £8.95. Oxford University Press: Oxford. 1987. ISBN 0-19-261643-9.

This is an admirable book. The author has a knack for

clear explanations, usually starting with an attractively naive observation, progressing to a clear discussion painlessly uncovering a multitude of facts. He demonstrates a nice judgment both for detail and when to extrapolate from theory to practice. This book should be available to all rheumatologists and orthopaedic surgeons, to read and recommend to their patients, and should be read by all relevant paramedical staff. Enquiring sufferers will benefit from buying it themselves.

The text provokes comment. Plain x rays may be of limited value, but how long can we resist magnetic resonance imaging scans—beautifully revealing when carried out by interested experts, and perhaps not so expensive all told? Spinal stenosis, in my experience, is a much more important cause of cauda equina or nerve root problems than of backache itself. I was not aware that hypermobility favoured sporting prowess and sound a note of caution about equating the ability to touch ones toes with generalised suppleness. My own experience would counsel against lying on the floor to relieve back pain: uncovered boards are too unyielding. In addition, I must warn against judging a bed from the show-room model, which will often have been subjected to the equivalent of many months of use. Patients should insist on a trial period.

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Note

The Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases launches Rheumatology 250

On 10 March 1988 The Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases launched its quarter millennium celebrations, which will continue until September 1988. Events will focus on historical achievements, current activities, and new developments. The programme includes a three day international medical congress at the Theatre Royal, Bath, and also a wide range of medical and educational meetings on all aspects of rheumatic diseases. Further details from Fiona Davies, Bath Institute for Rheumatic Diseases, Trim Bridge, Bath BA1 1HD.