£13.95 I suspect it is slightly more expensive than many of its competitors, but I would say to all aspiring rheumatologists, buy it anyway.


The initial feeling on settling down to review this book for a rheumatology audience was that there would be few who would have any particular interest in the subject, and hardly any that would choose to purchase it for their own private collection. There is, however, a little in this book for everyone, and it would be an excellent purchase for any postgraduate medical library.

The book breaks down into four broad sections. The first covers our growing knowledge of iron and the lymphomyeloid system, the second deals with iron and the inflammatory process, the third with iron and haemopoiesis, and the final section deals with the immunology of iron overload. A final appendix has been added, with an up-to-date review, detailing the problems with iron and iron binding proteins in tissue culture systems.

Of perhaps greatest interest to clinical rheumatologists, would be the section on iron and inflammation. Given that our PhD student (now Dr F J Andrews) was the major author on the section 'Iron and joint inflammation', we must confess to a slight bias. Nevertheless, this fairly readable review details a variety of ways in which iron may contribute to the peculiar persistence of inflammatory joint disease. A greater understanding of the mechanisms by which this ubiquitous metal controls cell growth, the proper function of metabolic processes, oxygen binding and transport, enzyme systems, electron transfer, and DNA replication, can be gleaned from the other sections. The editors have worked hard to choose authors not fearful of speculating around the periphery of our knowledge. Thus the sections dealing with the immunology of iron overload, iron and tumour cell growth, and the potential clinical uses of antitranferin receptor monoclonal antibodies should be of considerable interest to those interested in the immunological aspects of rheumatic diseases. There are, as far as I am aware, few precise accounts of this rapidly developing field.

All in all, a surprisingly interesting and readable book.

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There is an increasing awareness of osteoporosis by the general public and the medical profession. As a consequence more of the former will be seeking advice from the latter. This book, based on a conference held at the Royal College of Physicians in May 1989, will be welcomed by those medical practitioners who wish either to improve their knowledge about osteoporosis or would like an introduction to the topic. The chapters, based on lectures given by speakers at the conference, cover a range of topics which includes the epidemiology, diagnosis, and treatment of osteoporosis and also information on bone cell biology, strength, and mechanical stress. For those easily put off by the words cytokines and growth factor the chapter on bone cell biology will prove a pleasant insight into this rapidly expanding field. The treatment of osteoporosis is adequately covered with a chapter on conventional therapy, and there is also a further chapter by Dr Reeve on restoring trabecular bone mass in established osteoporosis. This includes alternative treatments, such as fluoride, diphosphonates, calcitonin, and intermittent parathyroid hormone. The role of calcium in osteoporosis remains controversial as judged by recent studies in the British Medical Journal and by the opposing views presented in this book where one author recommends 1000 mg daily for all early postmenopausal women, whereas the other would reserve calcium supplements for those elderly patients with established osteoporosis.

Rheumatologists, who are often forced to use corticosteroids for their patients, will find the chapter by Dr Reid on corticosteroid induced osteoporosis useful in improving their understanding of this common disorder. As pointed out by Dr Reid, although we know considerable amounts about the mechanisms of corticosteroid induced bone loss, we have yet to define the type of therapeutic intervention which will retard the development of this complication.

An increase in load bearing is associated with an increase in bone strength and mass. In theories on the pathogenesis of osteoporosis and in its management this fact is often ignored. The type of exercise which one should recommend to patients is going to be important as it is likely that only weight bearing and loading exercises are beneficial to the skeleton. It is thus with regret that the chapter on exercise and skeleton does not elaborate further on the type of exercises which the practitioner might recommend to his patients, who will increasingly ask the question about exercise and the prevention of bone loss.

This inexpensive book provides a readable introduction to the field of osteoporosis. As the authors have some reservations, I think this is unavoidable in a publication based on conference proceedings where there is a need to publish the proceedings as rapidly as possible. I would recommend that this book be purchased by all medical libraries as I think it will be useful to medical students and doctors in training. Any doctor who feels he needs to know more about the condition will greatly benefit from it and I think that general practitioners, orthopaedic surgeons, rheumatologists, endocrinologists, and gynaecologists, who are regularly seeing patients with osteoporosis, should either purchase this book or have ready access to it.

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In his preface to this book—the first volume of a planned series entitled 'Allergic disease and therapy'—the editor (Ross Rocklin) defines the purpose of the book as twofold: to review the ability of histamine to influence lymphoid cell functions in vitro and in vivo both in animals and humans, and to describe the use of H2 antagonists to augment immune responses in immunocompromised patients. The book is organised into sections covering these aims, each of which has a number of papers from research groups active in the field. This approach has led to some overlap in content between chapters, especially in section 1 of the histamine effects on immune functions in vitro. The later chapters, dealing with a number of clinical applications, are more separate and also much shorter, reflecting the preliminary nature of the results available in many cases. None of the clinical data is directly relevant to rheumatic diseases.

My overall impression is of a well written book, reasonably up-to-date with references to publications in 1988. It adopts a somewhat uncritical approach to the relevance of histamine as an immunomodulator (many in vitro effects require 10-6 M histamine or above) and does not consider some pharmacological differences between H2 antagonists containing imidazole, such as cimetidine, and non-imidazole compounds, such as ranitidine. I suspect the subject matter of the book will restrict its appeal to a select readership, made even more so by inspection of the price tag.

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Book reviews