Notes and news

Forthcoming events

In 1992

10–12 Dec First congress of the Osteoarthritis Research Society, Paris, France
Contact: Osteoarthritis Research Society, Executive Secretary, BP 105, 78110 Le Vesinet, France. Tel: 33 1 39527706

In 1993

24–26 Mar BSR tenth annual general meeting, Harrogate.
Closing date for submission of abstracts 4 December 1992
Contact: BSR, Lorraine Johnson, Conference Manager, 3 St Andrew’s Place, London NW1 4LB. Tel: 071 224 3739. Fax: 071 224 0156

30–31 Mar Third international symposium on anklylosing spondylitis, Middlesex Hospital—HLA-B27: 20 years on. Registration fee £150
Contact: Dr Alan Ebringer, Department of Rheumatology, Middlesex Hospital, London W1

1–4 Apr Second international symposium on the immunotherapy of the rheumatic diseases, Brighton
Contact: Professor G S Panayi, Rheumatology Unit, Division of Medicine, 4th Floor Hunts House, UMDS, Guy’s Hospital, London SE1 9RT. Tel: 071 955 4394. Fax: 071 407 5134

4–10 July XVIIIth ILAR congress of rheumatology, Barcelona, Spain
Contact: Viajes Iberia Congresos, Diagonal, 523 1o 08029 Barcelona, Spain. Tel: 34 3 4195151. Fax: 34 3 4051390. Programmes available from the BLAR secretariat.

Book reviews


Everything you ever wanted to know about second line drugs? Yes, almost!
It is rewarding to see the term 'second line' applied in a transatlantic text. One hopes it at least avoids potentially misleading or contrived adjectives such as ‘specific’ or ‘disease modifying’. So the book tackles the use of such drugs to make patients better. How one evaluates that, and distinguishes the benefits from symptom relieving drugs or steroids, is the subject of the first part of the book.

There follows a section devoted to the education of every new senior house officer. It quite simply tackles the practical use of available agents in rheumatoid arthritis with a modest amount of background information. Every senior house officer’s consultant is bound to disagree with the views expressed occasionally, but the chapters exhibit the practical experience of their authors.

The order of the contributions in the third part of the book, devoted to second line agents in other arthritides, seemed strange. Psoriatic arthritis was referred to on only three pages, and I could find no mention of the use of cyclosporin. Osteoarthritis is not a condition in which most would consider applying the term second line agents, and anklyosing spondylitis merits only a page in a brief chapter on the treatment of seronegative polyarthritis. I doubt this reflects the challenge of clinical problems presenting at most rheumatology clinics, but it may reflect our current level of ignorance.

The fourth section is devoted to the future with an impressive coverage of possibilities.

In a book with varying authors there can never be clear cut answers to difficult clinical problems. In treating rheumatoid arthritis one chapter states that the condition should be ‘at least partially reversible’—though if all the readers’ definitions were examined there might be major differences. So you may not know exactly for whom to start treatment with second line drugs, when to do so, or when to withdraw the agents; you may not be able to define serious risks precisely to patients, but this book is a helpful guide and would be an asset to a departmental library—mainly because of its second section.

Should you decide to order it, however, be prepared for American spelling, a slightly inaccurate index, and ensure your supplier uses sturdy packaging—the review copy did not stand up well to the rigours of the United Kingdom Post Office. The binding is rather loose, making access to information easy, but raises concern over durability.

In summary, recommended, but with some minor reservations.


This handbook is compact with a high density of text for such a small volume. It is divided into four main chapters on the subjects of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, steroids, antirheumatic and immunosuppressive drugs, and the drugs used for gout. The final chapter outlines briefly the drug treatment of specific rheumatic diseases. In each chapter there is a description of pharmacological mechanisms followed by more clinical details.

The basic pharmacology is comprehensive but often speculative and references to source material are absent. The line drawings are clear and the tables, which provide the pharmacokinetic details of individual drugs, may be useful for quick reference. There is little to recommend the clinical half of the book. The text is rather indigestible and full of wasted sentences, which should have been struck out by the editor’s pen. Little consideration is given to clinical information of practical value such as, to give two examples, the arguments for and against the use of short v long-acting non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs or the importance of body weight when prescribing hydroxyclooroquine.

If a ‘handbook’ is designed to fit into the pocket of a white coat then I cannot recommend this book. It may have a place on the library shelf for pharmacological reference, but most rheumatologists would, I expect, rather consult a larger textbook.

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