Letter to the Editor

Mast Cells in Parathyroid Glands

In a study of 21 cases of parathyroid adenoma (Anderson, 1974) mast cells were shown to occur with greater frequency in the accompanying 'normal' glands. Adenomas showed less than one mast cell per field (mean $\pm$ SEM = 0.5 ± 0.07), whereas for 58 accompanying 'normal' glands there were more than two per field (2.77 ± 0.33). To enable a comparison against parathyroid tissue from cases with normal calcium metabolism, sections have been prepared and assessed in the same manner from parathyroid glands removed at postmortem dissection. A total of 81 glands has been examined from 24 cases, comprising 11 females and 13 males (combined mean age 68.9 yr). The analysis has given a corresponding value of 0.58 ± 0.06 for mast cells per field for this group. Thus, mast cells are prominent only in 'normal' glands associated with an overactive parathyroid.

Attempts to explain these observations can be made by considering tissue mast cells as either a general or local feature. Neiman, Bischel, and Lukes (1972) have indicated that secondary hyperparathyroidism may be the reason why increased numbers of mast cells are observed in various tissues of uraemic patients undergoing long-term haemodialysis. Here an analogy is drawn with the studies of Rockoff and Armstrong (1970) where chronic administration of parathyroid hormone resulted in accumulation of mast cells in bone marrow. Alternatively, mast cells may reflect changes in local tissue function as suggested by studies of rodent thyroid stimulation (Melander and Sundler, 1973) or as seen in thymus gland suppression (Haelst, 1967). In the context of association with overactive parathyroid tissue, the increased frequency of mast cells in 'normal' glands favours suppression.

While the significance of these findings remains to be defined, the ease of mast cell detection in 'normal' glands on frozen sections stained with toluidine blue may prove valuable to the pathologist asked to distinguish between adenoma and hyperplasia on the basis of small biopsies.

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Book reviews

Gastrointestinal Pathophysiology. Edited by Frank P. Brooks. (Pp. xiii + 329; illustrated; £3.00.) New York, London, Toronto: Oxford University Press (Oxford Medical Publications). 1975.

In this book is set out clearly the stock-in-trade information of 11 experts in clinical gastroenterology who teach or have taught at the University of Pennsylvania. It is intended for students: a large fraction of the contents is suitable for them but is too elementary to interest more experienced practitioners, apart from reviewers. Nevertheless the majority of teachers will find that the level of expertise reached is such as to make the book suitable to be a first source, more especially as the references are well chosen. The chapter on jaundice, for example, is a model of clarity. The book is certainly excellent value at £3.00.

J. N. HUNT

Neoplasia of Head and Neck. A Collection of Papers Presented at the Seventeenth Annual Clinical Conference on Cancer, 1972, at The University of Texas System Cancer Center M.D. Anderson Hospital and Tumor Institute, Houston, Texas. (Pp. ix + 406; illustrated; £13.50.) Chicago: Year Book Medical Publishers. (UK distributors: Lloyd-Luke Medical Books.) 1974.

This is an important book for both the specialist in head and neck cancer and others who have occasionally to manage sufferers from malignant disease in this area, a difficult field with few very good results to encourage doctor or patient. Many of the advances in the last 25 years have come from closer attention to the results of sound morphological studies, for example, in the field of salivary and cutaneous tumours. From the histopathologist's viewpoint the interest of the whole work lies less in the presentation of the pathology, which was not the purpose of the conference, than in an appreciation of the central rôle of pathological diagnosis. There is a wealth of lively clinical discussion and an appreciation of the rôle of the pathologist as part of a team. Few clinicians are indifferent to the pathological basis of disease, though Leavens and Barrash are unaware that

cyndroma and adenocystic carcinoma are alternative names for the same tumour (p. 263) and, predictably, the immunologists write about 'solid neoplasms', in contrast, I suppose to the liquid neoplasms studied by haematologists. There is much clinicopathological correlation and factual matter presented. The book is recommended as a rounded presentation of current management of head and neck cancer.

A. LEVENE

The Poisoned Patient: The Role of the Laboratory. Ciba Foundation Symposium 26 (new series). Edited by Ruth Porter and Maeve O'Connor. (Pp. viii + 325; illustrated; Dfl 55.00; US \$21.25.) Amsterdam: Elsevier. 1974.

The number of patients admitted to hospital because of accidental or deliberate poisoning increases inexorably year by year until nowadays something in the region of 10-20% of all acute medical admissions are due to drug-induced or drug-exacerbated disease. The range and variety of compounds responsible has expanded almost as rapidly as the number of individuals affected, and the time was obviously ripe, therefore, for a symposium on 'The rôle of the laboratory in the diagnosis, management, and treatment of the poisoned patient' such as was held in February 1974 at the Ciba Foundation in London. The proceedings of this conference has just been published. Like all symposium proceedings there are differences in the standard and quality of the individual contributions but, in this instance, the balance is decidedly favourable. The result is a useful, interesting, and informative book which provides an authoritative statement of the current position and practical guidance on the diagnosis, management, and treatment of the poisoned patient as well as giving pointers to future technological developments—especially in analytical procedures. Comparatively little space is devoted to the forensic aspects of poisoning. Despite its title the book is concerned exclusively with poisoning due to drugs and not to toxic agents in general.

The 17 or so major contributions cover a spectrum of topics from the purely analytical to a more or less general statement of the problem as encountered by the practising clinician. This includes the investigation and treatment of the acutely poisoned patient,

on the one hand, and of the chronic abuser of drugs or drug addicts on the other.

All of the contributions are readable and intelligible to the non-expert reader, though one or two seem slightly out of place, or inappropriate, to the rest of the contents. Eight of the chapters deal largely or exclusively with newer techniques and methodology such as luminescence, GC-MS, and radioimmunoassay in relation to the detection and measurement of drugs in blood, urine, and tissues. The printed discussions of the main contributions are more informative—and far better edited—than is customary with symposium proceedings. I have no hesitation in recommending this as a worthwhile book which deserves to be widely read—or at least dipped into—by anyone concerned with the diagnosis and treatment of patients suffering from drug-induced disease despite its general title.

V. MARKS

Forensic Medicine, 7th edition. By Keith Simpson. (Pp. viii + 362; illustrated. £6.30.) London: Edward Arnold. 1974.

Here is the well-known mixture as before and still every bit as efficacious. Although the material in Professor Simpson's world famous little book has not much changed, it has not been re-edited since 1969, and this edition brings up to date such legal matters as the Family Law Reform Act and the Misuse of Drugs Act. The only regrettable addition to the volume is the word 'Emeritus' in the qualifications of the author. Forensic pathology can ill afford the retirement of such an eminent figure from active academic life, and it is to be hoped that Professor Simpson will continue to exert his influence for the good of the subject, and to publish his book for many years to come.

A. C. HUNT

Tumors of the Major Salivary Glands. (Fascicle 10, Second Series, Atlas of Tumor Pathology.) By A. C. Thackray and R. B. Lucas. (Pp. xii + 144; illustrated; \$8.85.) Washington: Armed Forces Institute of Pathology. 1974.

Whereas the WHO *Histological Typing of Salivary Gland Tumours* is a suitable brief introductory text for everyman—

student, pathologist, surgeon—the present volume has the specialist histopathologist very much in mind. It is a definitive practical monograph incorporating discussions of interesting data and discoveries in this field which have appeared in the last 20 years. The high-quality illustrations of morbid anatomy and histopathology are relevant and provided in generous numbers. Two small criticisms only are offered. It is not apparent why references to the minor salivary gland tumours are totally ignored for, after all, the differences from major salivary gland tumours are mainly clinical and statistical. Their appearance in other fascicles will inevitably be accompanied by the referral back to the main fascicle. A couple of extra pages of print would have provided a summary of essential information. Secondly, the selected use of asterisks added to titles and subtitles is nowhere explained.

The book is indispensable for the hospital and departmental library.

A. LEVENE