

Book reviews

Food Allergy and Intolerance. J Brostoff, SJ Challacombe. (Pp 1032; £75.) Bailliere Tindall. 1986. ISBN 0-7020-1156-8.

The current landscape of food allergy can best be described as oases of good sense in a desert of arid speculation, superstition, and downright banality. This large tome ranks with Professor Lessof's contributions as one of the few attempts to provide a reputable map through such terrain. The parts of the book dealing with the physiology and immunology of the gastrointestinal system are very good indeed and underscore the determination of the editors to produce order out of chaos. Indeed, the first 400 pages of this book provide an outstanding guide for students of this subject who really want to know the extent to which the study of food allergy has approached academic respectability. Certainly, writing of this quality helps to achieve this end.

The book's touch is less certain when it deals with real and alleged manifestations of food allergy and its diagnosis. Certain sections are scholarly and restrained in the best traditions of scientific clinical investigation. This is particularly true of the sections dealing with inflammatory bowel disease, milk intolerance, and paediatric disorders. The editors might retort that many areas had to be included in the interests of providing a reasonable perspective but nevertheless there are many subjects which fall short of these standards. For example, one simplistic figure dealing with alleged "immune dysregulation" reveals the limited extent to which objectivity has reigned in probing the alleged association of allergy and autoimmune endocrinopathy. Similarly, the elaborate figure setting out the "model for the pathogenesis of chronic candidiasis sensitivity" is on a par with the rest of the discussion of this subject and of dubious scientific value. Many of the clinical sections are acceptable because more discerning authors are properly restrained about the extent to which they feel food allergy plays any part in the pathogenesis and management of diseases of obscure aetiology. One can but admire the responsibility of the author of the chapter on "Diagnosis of food allergy and intolerance" who writes that "no laboratory test can prove food intolerance; at best it can add meaningful weight to a clinical suspicion". If all the clinical contributors had shown this degree of wisdom, the contents of the book could have been

fitted into 600 pages with little loss of real substance.

Overall this book is highly recommended to discerning readers as one of the few texts prepared to tackle this emotional subject in a scientific and responsible manner. Furthermore, it is pleasingly produced and more easily readable than the purely philosophical tomes ostensibly dealing with the same subject.

AM DENMAN

Clinical Tests: Histopathology. FJ Scheuer, BT Chalk. (Pp 128; soft cover £12.) Wolfe Medical Publications Ltd. 1986. ISBN 0-7234-0885-8.

This book gives the non-pathologist a comprehensive overview of the full range of current histopathological techniques, their uses, and limitations. The illustrations are clear and of high quality. My one complaint is that its appeal and usefulness to clinicians could perhaps have been enhanced by including a short section of hints on how they should handle special types of specimen, for example lymph nodes, medical skins, gastrointestinal, testicular, renal and muscle biopsies, since there still seems to be widespread ignorance in these areas. Nevertheless this book should give a useful insight into the workings of a modern histopathology laboratory to medical students, clinicians, junior laboratory technicians, and interested laymen alike.

E MARY THOMPSON

Diabetes and Protein Glycosylation. Measurement and Biologic Relevance. MP Cohen. (Pp 140; DM 98.) Springer. 1986. ISBN 3-540-96297-2.

Measurement of glycosylated haemoglobin is now widely used to assess control in diabetic patients. Dr Cohen, in this delightful monograph, presents a comprehensive account of the chemistry, methods for measurement, and clinical uses of these and other glycosylated proteins found in serum and tissues.

For my part I found the section which discusses the pathophysiological importance of protein glycosylation and its relation to the complications of diabetes and to the "aging" process most interesting. Add to this over 400 up to date references and one really has something worth putting on the book shelf. The only criticism I have is the price and would strongly recommend a paper back edition.

BRENDA SLAVIN

The Pathology of Incipient Neoplasia. Ed Henson, J Albores-Saavedra. (Pp 463; £60.) WB Saunders. 1986. ISBN 0-7216-1144-3.

The preface indicates that the primary aims are to familiarise pathologists with precursor and early lesions of malignancy disease at different sites and thus promote earlier diagnosis. To achieve their aim, the editors have enlisted a number of distinguished contributors to write about their own particular area of interest and most of the organs of the body are thus covered in the 23 chapters.

It will be obvious that some sites, such as the skin, gastrointestinal tract, and uterine cervix are much more accessible to inspection and biopsy than others (liver, pancreas, CNS), with the result that knowledge of precancerous lesions is much more complete in the former and this is reflected in the text. Where less is known, there is a greater tendency to speculate and to describe lesions which are clearly already malignant. There is some repetition, as would be expected in a multiauthor book, but this is not necessarily a bad thing. The book is well produced and most of the illustrations are good. This should prove a useful reference work.

AG STANFIELD

Complement in Health and Disease. Immunology and Medicine. Ed K Whaley. (Pp 326; £50.) MTP Press Limited. 1987. ISBN 0-85200-954-2.

To read about complement is to look at slightly illogical cascades and breakdown products, each with its own highly forgettable cipher. We suffer from the need to maintain the conventional shorthand for complement components which imposes a superficial incomprehensibility. This volume, edited by Keith Whaley who is a leading expert, overcomes many of the difficulties in describing the complement system. It consists of a series of reviews outlining its most important aspects including complement deficiencies, genetics, and molecular polymorphism; its relation to immune complex diseases; autoantibodies to complement components; and the roles of complement in viral, bacterial, and parasitic infections. Some chapters were extremely good; and I found the outline of C1-inhibitor deficiency and angio-oedema most enjoyable. For an up to date summary of the subject it provides all that is needed; my only regret is that complement continues to have such an unfortunate nomenclature.

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