

BOOK REVIEWS

New Drugs. 3rd Edn. J Feely Ed. BMJ Publishing Group, 1994. £17.95 Pp 448. Illustrated. ISBN No: 0 7279 0821 9.

Any doctor engaged in active practice of internal medicine will be disappointed by this book. Of the 31 chapters, only 13 contain information on some of the newer drugs. The chapter on gallstones covers all aspects of treatment including endoscopic, lithotryptic and surgical methods. This book would be better entitled "Current Treatments" as this title reflects more accurately the contents.

There are some very good chapters. Those on "Drugs in Cerebral and Peripheral Arterial Disease", "New Drug Treatments in Acne and Psoriasis" and "Antibacterial Drugs" were particularly good. The chapter on "Drug Overdosage and Poisoning" was an excellent realistic guide to this problem but it did not concentrate particularly on special problems related to new drugs.

I would recommend this book as providing a good synopsis of current medical therapy. It is particularly good at providing more detailed information on treatments employed in specialities other than one's own. The title should be changed, the general chapters eliminated and the cost could be reduced. Even so, I would not put it in the top half of my list of books to buy.

M J WORLD

Liver Transplantation: Practice and Management. J Neuberger and M R Lucey Eds. BMJ Publishing Group, 1994. UK £27.95/Overseas £34.95. Pp xv + 400. Illustrated. ISBN No: 0 7279 0787 5.

This book has been aimed primarily at those physicians who, although they do not work in liver units, select and refer patients for liver transplantation and are involved in their aftercare. As over 2000 patients were transplanted in Europe in 1990 compared to fewer than 50 in 1980 more and more physicians will need to be informed on this topic.

This textbook is an Anglo-American production although both editors trained at the King's College Hospital Liver Unit in the early 1980s. Details of donor organ retrieval, allocation, and logistics are both the UK and the USA and public health issues are addressed from both perspectives.

Many aspects of transplantation are described excellently and there is an overall honest non-proselytising approach to the issues. The sections detailing management of the transplant candidate on the waiting list and in the transplant unit and the immunological, surgical and medical complications of transplantation are particularly strong. Psychiatric evaluation and rehabilitation are dealt with clearly.

However some weaknesses must be mentioned. The chapter on specific indications is somewhat loosely edited and has a patchy quality. There is unnecessary duplication throughout and some sections are padded out – not all the

boxes are justified, for example. One suspects that the shelf-life of this book will be limited given the rapid advances in this field.

Although of relatively limited interest this text will be helpful to those physicians specifically targeted and a copy should be available in every DGH or equivalent hospital library.

W M A MELIA

Employing Staff. 5th Edn. N Ellis Ed. BMJ Publishing Group, 1994. £8.95. Pp ix + 141. ISBN No: 0 7279 0833 3.

This short and popular text from the BMA has now reached its fifth edition since first publication in 1984. Service medical officers have long regarded the subject as irrelevant, relying instead on their local MoD Civilian Staff Management. As civilianization and integration with the NHS proceeds, these long established methods will decline in favour of more direct employment by medical staff. Senior medical officers, practice managers and hospital staff must rapidly learn current and prospective UK and EC legislation.

This text is first rate. In a concise and surprisingly readable 141 pages it covers the main aspects with advice on further sources of information. It details the changes to the rights of expectant mothers coming into force in October 1994 and has detailed chapters on sexual and racial discrimination. Sexual harassment is described with comprehensive lists of actions that may constitute harassment.

It is thoroughly recommended for any doctors leaving for the NHS; for those staying in the Service it may remove the spectacle of further courts martial. Those with a melancholic streak could start at the back – "Redundancy".

J E BURGESS

How to Write a Paper. G M Hall Ed. BMJ Publishing Group, 1994. £8.95. Pp ix + 117. ISBN No: 0 7279 08227.

No one doubts that there is considerable pressure upon junior doctors to publish articles; it is a sort of reverse censorship. Yet, little is taught as to how best get one's name in print. This book addresses the problem in 117 pages. For a multi-author (17) work there is surprisingly little overlap or contradiction. Few aspects of the process from having the idea to signing the final proofs are missing. However, statements are sometimes made as to what should happen and not what actually can occur. Not all journals submit to referees "blind" – the author rarely learns who has reviewed the piece, but the identity of the writer is usually not concealed. If you suspect your name to be "blacklisted" submit under your co-author's name alone, then add yours at the proof-reading stage. In chap

ter 6, "Titles, Abstract and Author" the Vancouver Group guidelines are cited, and also the sound advice that all contributing authors should sign the submission letter. This does not cover the instance when a co-author is, without his knowledge, "dropped". Some form of written understanding between contributors early on in the proceedings is helpful. Much of the book can be summarised under the headings of neatness, attention to detail and courtesy regarding publishing conventions. Consequently, some of the chapters read rather like those manuals on how to pass examinations. Still, the cost of the book is a cheaper way to learn than by trial and error. There is also the caution made that luck plays, as in so many aspects of life, its leading part. Many writers are mindful of the aphorism that the harder they work, the "luckier" they become in obtaining those acceptance slips.

J D C BENNETT

Medical Statistics on Personal Computers. 2nd Edn. R A Brown & J Swanson Beck. BMJ Publishing Group, 1994. £10.95. Pp viii + 147. ISBN No: 0 7279 07719.

It is only in the twelfth and last chapter of this little book that just five statistical packages are compared and contrasted and some helpful recommendations made. Therefore the title of this book is misleading. Essentially, it discusses ten selected topics in medical statistics which are important, if not fundamental, and not described well, if at all, in similar-sized books on this subject. In this regard it is valuable, but references to the statistical programs which will permit the different forms of analysis are made only occasionally.

I would recommend strongly that this book should be read by all medical researchers who should concentrate on Chapter Ten where the importance of statistical experimental design is considered. This chapter should possibly be placed first in a future edition.

There would appear to be great scope for the enlargement of this book so that more detailed description of the different statistical computer packages is possible. Additionally, it would appear that there is great scope for medical statisticians to write new programs which will enhance the range of choice which, at present, would appear to be unduly limited for the non-statistician.

M J WORLD

Journal of Medical Screening. BMJ Publishing Group, 1994. £85.00 Institutions Worldwide/£52.00 Individual. Pp 76. ISSN No: 0966 1413.

The Journal of Medical Screening is a new quarterly publication, first launched in January 1994. Its aim is to cover all aspects of medical screening and advance the science of the discipline. Its layout is as for the British Medical Journal (BMJ), although the index is to be found on the rear cover.

It stresses in the editorial the philosophy that screening should be about the prevention of disability and disease,

and not simply the early detection of disease as an end in itself. It intends to cover topics including the principles and theory of medical screening, epidemiology, ethical and psychological issues, policy and strategy.

Papers in this issue of interest are an Australian paper on the psychological consequences of screening mammography, assessing value for money in medical screening, and a paper from Oxford asking whether we should screen for growth problems in children.

As well as Book Reviews, the Journal also has a "Screening Brief", in which all relevant data have been pooled and then summarised on a particular topic. In this issue there is an excellent and concise summary on the current state of screening for breast cancer.

Although most screening programmes are targeted at the primary care level, this Journal is more general and will be of interest to many hospital disciplines, including Paediatrics and Obstetrics. The main benefit of a Journal such as this is that it may help draw together, and perhaps encourage, research into screening practices so that no screening test is introduced into the general population before its value has been determined.

At £85 annual subscription this Journal may be too expensive for many smaller practices, but I would strongly recommend it for the larger practices and hospital reading rooms. I would also advise any candidate sitting the MRCGP exam to peruse this Journal in preparation for the orals.

A McPNEICE

New Perspectives in Lung Cancer. N Thatcher & Spiro, Eds. BMJ Publishing Group, 1994. £21.95/Overseas £24.00. Pp 193. Illustrated. ISBN No: 0 7279 0786 7.

This soft-back book of 193 pages, costing £21.95, is made up of 11 chapters examining various aspects of the aetiology, pathogenesis, diagnosis, management and palliation of lung cancer. There are also chapters examining other topics including quality of life assessment, patient benefit in clinical trials and genetic changes in lung cancer.

The book is based on a series of five review articles which were published in Thorax during 1991. These five articles have been revised and a further six added to produce this book. The editors have done an admirable job in producing a text of a consistent style that is easy to read and assimilate.

The chapters are all informative review articles which are extensively referenced to allow further reading. I particularly enjoyed the chapters relating to how much investigation and the use of haematopoietic growth factors and lung cancer treatment.

I am unsure where this book will fit with other publications on the subject. It lacks detail for those specialising in the management of lung cancer and most other thoracic physicians and surgeons have access to just under half the manuscript in their old copies of Thorax.

In conclusion this is probably a book for the hospital library rather than the individual where it will provide a concise update and bibliography.

D G SINCLAIR

ABC of Alcohol. 3rd Edn. A Paton, Ed. BMJ Publishing Group, 1994. £7.95. Pp vi + 32. Illustrated. ISBN No: 0-7279-0812-X.

This is a useful handbook for all who are engaged in the treatment of alcohol problems. Its language is clear and the information presented is largely accurate. Most of the recommendations are based on common sense. Although couched in slightly oblique terms, the advice to the 40+ year old with alcohol problems continues to be "abstain". This seems to be a return to traditional wisdom after recent flirtations with controlled drinking.

There are plenty of practical hints about how to extract the truth from these most evasive of patients. The book is persuasive but stops short of crusading zeal. I can recommend it for anyone who has an interest in this subject.

R M L ANDERSON

Neurological Emergencies. R A C Hughes, Ed. BMJ Publishing Group 1994. £19.95 Pp vii + 359. ISBN No: 0 7279 0756 5.

This is a useful review of a number of important acute neurological presentations that may confront the physician or neurologist. As with many multi-author text books the quality of articles is a little variable, this variability embracing style as well as content. The articles

written by North American authors are admirable reviews of their subject but sometimes suggest a clinical management that may not prove practical in the United Kingdom. For example in the case of ischaemic stroke, the requirement for rapid imaging of the head to exclude haemorrhage prior to the use of intravenous Heparin is unlikely to be practicable in hospitals without ready access to CT scanning on site.

The layout of the chapters includes review sections at the end of each article that provide a useful summary of the main clinical points made. There are chapters on coma, stroke, status epilepticus, subarachnoid haemorrhage, cord compression and many other topics and each section is concisely referenced.

These articles have all individually appeared in the Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry but their grouping in this single volume will provide a useful resource to neurologists and physicians alike. After the publication of the chapter on the management of subarachnoid haemorrhage a lively correspondence took place in the Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry and this correspondence is printed in the volume providing interesting reading about contentious issues in the management of this difficult condition. The editor states that this book is inevitably targeted at the doctor in training and will certainly prove useful at that level. However, I can recommend it to all those physicians who carry the responsibility of care for acute neurological emergencies.

C J K ELLIOTT

OBITUARIES

Regimental Headquarters would welcome self-written obituaries and when completed they should be forwarded to Regimental Secretary RHQ, RAMC, Keogh Barracks, Ash Vale, Aldershot, Hants GU12 5RQ.