enterologists, one a surgeon, the other a physician, and both with a special expertise of hepatology. Within its 105 pages there are short chapters on methods of investigation of liver disease, gall stones, jaundice, hepatitis, cirrhosis, alcoholic liver disease, cancer, etc, and there are more specialised sections on tropical liver disease, the complications of liver disease and liver transplantation. The style is uncomplicated, the information and advice given is sensible, and although many lay readers might have difficulty in following some parts of the text there are simple line drawings to help with the anatomy and a series of black and white photographs of various aspects of clinical liver disease. One or two of the latter might have a salutory effect on any intending alcoholics!

Whilst aimed at the educated lay reader, one cannot but help comment on how much factual information has been squeezed into such a small space, and that nurses and perhaps the occasional undergraduate medical student would also benefit from seeing this book. As an exercise in seeing what is expected with regard to good communication with patients it would be useful as there is no doubt that books such as this would not be required if the medical profession's ability to communicate were better.

I cannot see a great market for this small book, but one must congratulate the authors on achieving what they have. I note there is as yet no volume in the series on 'Stomach and intestines: the facts', but I cannot imagine this deficiency (if it is one) will persist for long.

ALAN E READ


By its sheer bulk this book seems to be saying: 'Accept food reactions as a serious scientific discipline or else...'. Indeed, when 83 respected authors write 61 well referenced chapters on a subject one must admit it has come of age. The authors are from a variety of disciplines and countries. Only a handful are gastroenterologists (including R Wright, P Asquith, J Walker-Smith, and J Hunter) and the section on gut diseases is relatively short. It covers comprehensively the expected diseases, however - gluten toxicity, IBS, IBD, and paediatric syndromes of vomiting and diarrhoea. The Cambridge group presents its good results with elimination diets in 77 patients with Crohn's disease (as already published) but Roy Shorter dismisses food allergy as playing no role in IBD. Gastroenterologists who are already familiar with the literature will be none the wiser for reading these chapters, at least in relation to managing their patients. If they browse through the rest of the book, however, they will learn much about basic mechanisms of gut immunology and food evoked reactions throughout the body. Full cover is given to gut associated lymphocytes and macrophages, to mucosal antibodies, to antigen handling by the gut and to mechanisms of damage to the gut (including non-immune mechanisms). There is also much to be learnt about food itself with big chapters on food families and rotation diets and on the new field of dietary lectins. Non-GI problems are extensively covered, including asthma, eczema, migraine, and the hyperkinetic syndrome. 'What tests should a clinician ask for?' sounded a promising chapter but it was not very helpful. The gold standard is said to be a double blind encapsulated food challenge but we are not told how to do it.

Intriguingly, a Polish professor diagnoses food allergy by dripping food extracts on to the gastric mucosa and watching it redden through an endoscope. Startlingly, he claims that gastric and duodenal ulcers heal with cromoglycate as often as with cimetidine. I was unconvinced, however, by the chapter on subcutaneous food extract injection therapy which is claimed by the American author to help IBS, Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. Has he not heard of placebo responses?

Like all big multi-author books this one has suffered from a long production time but it succeeds in its aim of providing encyclopaedic cover of an expanding if still contentious subject. The subject is plagued by pseudoscience (dramatically so in the Dallas 'Environmental Control Unit') but properly controlled trials are being done and, one day, its true place in medicine will become apparent.

K W HEATON


The Clinics Series published by W B Saunders have for many years provided a ready source of up to date information on growing points in clinical medicine. The present new series, of which this volume on Viral hepatitis is the second issue, is directed towards physicians working in the tropics and all those faced with illness in immigrants and returning travellers. An outstanding international group of authors have been selected. The global importance of hepatitis B, its biology, treatment and relationship to hepatocellular carcinoma are fully covered. The chapter by H C Thomas and A M L Lever on treatment is particularly well done, although the use of such drugs as interferon is quite outside the scope of most
Food allergy and intolerance

K W Heaton

Gut 1987 28: 1551
doi: 10.1136/gut.28.11.1551

Updated information and services can be found at:
http://gut.bmj.com/content/28/11/1551.1.citation

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