fundamental point about the representation of acidity.

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References

- 1 Hoel PG. *Introduction to mathematical statistics*. New York: Wiley, 1954: 56–7.
- 2 Taylor AG. *Advanced calculus*. Boston: Ginn & Co., 1955: 204–5.
- 3 England JM. *Medical research*. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, 1975: 133–5.

Reply

SIR,—Drs Rawlings and Lucas have misunderstood. Of course I accept that arithmetic and geometric means are not numerically identical. What I was suggesting was that the expected differences between those means are not generally *considered* in interpretation and therefore the use of a common method would allow authors to compare one set of data with another. I also suggested that there are reasons why median data are preferable to mean data from skewed distributions. When comparisons between different studies are made, for example as estimates of a drug's potency, conclusions are bound to depend upon the analytical methods used and moves to unify these, I believe, are desirable.

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Books

Surgical treatment of digestive disease. Edited by F Moody. (Pp. 847; illustrated; £95.) Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1986.

In my opinion this is the best definitive textbook that is available on the subject of digestive surgery. The authors, a formidable crew in their own right, have assembled a board of 86 co-authors to write individual chapters. Each of these co-authors is acknowledged as being the best in this field in the United States and therefore the world.

Only two contributors are not from the United States and these are much revered father figures of digestive surgery, long since retired. Perhaps the authors are telling us that no contemporary European surgeons have anything useful to say. It is more likely that the senior author's editorial experience

has taught them to know which of their colleagues not only write well but also deliver the goods on time. Therefore, it is no surprise to find this book provides the most authoritative last word on each and every aspect of the subject. It would be invidious to single out any one chapter for special mention. Everywhere I dipped in this book I found well written, balanced summaries of the present state of our knowledge. I have no doubt that a candidate for any higher surgical examination would pass if well versed in the wisdom and knowledge of this book.

Although 880 pages of text seems a lot, they cover a vast subject. Inevitably some of the statements appear as unsubstantiated didacticism. To present all the arguments and evidence for and against any particular option or recommendation, however, would have made this book unmanageably large.

This book manages to concentrate on technique in those sections where technique is important, such as in anti-reflux procedures at the gastro-oesophageal junction or the construction of continent ileal pouches, whereas in other sections the precise technique is hardly mentioned.

Inevitably there are a few disadvantages, the most obvious is the price. There are not many books priced at more than 10 pence a page and there are few examination candidates I know who could afford the outlay of £95. Nevertheless it is well worthwhile encouraging your library to devote a large portion of its budget towards purchasing this book rather than three or four other lesser monographs on the subject. Another disadvantage is that with so many co-authors the standard of writing and illustrating is not uniform. This is more noticeable with the illustrations than with the text, which has been edited extremely well. The main disadvantage of the illustrations is that many of the co-authors have reproduced line drawings or halftones from their previous papers and many of these are labelled as being 'used by permission'. In most instances it would have been better had the permission not been given and a single artist commissioned to perform clear line drawings. Some chapters are well illustrated, some poorly illustrated and some not illustrated at all. These criticisms are relatively insignificant, however, when weighed against the general high quality of the production and the overwhelming weight of surgical knowledge and wisdom.

J ALEXANDER-WILLIAMS

Nutrition in clinical surgery Edited by M Deitel. (Pp. 411; illustrated; £55.) Baltimore & London: Williams & Wilkins, 1985.

The role of nutrition in the clinical management of patients has undergone a revolution in the last two