Notes and activities

BSG Research Grants

The British Society of Gastroenterology invites applications from ordinary members of the Society for grants in support of research projects. Further details are set out in an explanatory leaflet which together with application forms is available from the BSG Secretariat, University College Hospital Medical School, Department of Surgery, The Rayne Institute, University Street, London WC1E 6JJ.

Extension of Liver Unit at King’s College Hospital

Dr Roger Williams is to be congratulated on the gift which has been received from the United Arab Emirates government to extend his research department in order to expand his programme into the many problems arising from liver cancer and hepatitis infection. The gift, which will amount to £750,000, is a particularly imaginative one as it will enable the King’s College Hospital Liver Unit to concentrate on research studies in depth. This important development will be very widely appreciated in Great Britain. The immense health problems of the Gulf area can be solved only by achieving real co-ordinated fundamental research along the lines which have already established Dr Roger Williams’ reputation.

Second International Symposium on Hepatotoxicity

This symposium will be held in Jerusalem, Israel, from 2-7 April 1978. The programme will consist of formal presentations by faculty and presentation of free papers from submitted abstracts. The deadline for submission of abstracts to Dr H. J. Zimmerman, V.A. Hospital, Washington, D.C., USA, is 15 January 1978. Details from Seminars and Symposia, 505 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022, USA.

Books

Dictionary of Medical Ethics Edited by A. S. Duncan, G. R. Dunstan, and R. B. Welbourn. (Pp. 336; £4.90.) Darton, Longman, and Todd: London, 1977. This book fell to pieces in my hand. To be precise, the last 40 pages have already fallen out. It is a paperback where the pages are stuck and not sewn in. Not enough glue was used.

Apart from this mishap, it is valuable. Although dictionaries on 5000 subjects have already been published, no dictionary on medical ethics has appeared until this year. There is need for one because ethical problems have so greatly increased because of medical and scientific progress. Sometimes this has been so rapid that the innovators themselves have hardly been able to examine the implications in advance. Also moral problems have become more acute because of new options provided by the birth control pill and so on.

This is an interdisciplinary book produced by 116 contributors, all experienced and expert in the subject which they discuss. Topics covered range from abortion, artificial insemination, ‘sex reversal’, and screening, to tissue transplants and transcendental meditation. Information is provided about the customs of religions such as Judaism and Islam which may create problems in hospital patients. Obviously there are parts which seem outside the scope of ethics but this is inevitable as there is no clear-cut definition of the subject. It all makes very interesting reading and is most enjoyable to browse through or to use as a reference book. No one can write about medical ethics without a bias of some sort but the arguments for and against are presented remarkably fairly as, for example, in the part on private practice. References to the literature are provided at the end of many sections. Today a much wider public than doctors alone is concerned in many medical matters: ministers of religion, social workers, lawyers, teachers and counsellors of various types. All these are expected to know about difficult medical problems, especially if they affect decisions by the individual, and this book is intended for them as well as for doctors. An expert on book binding tells me that the risk of you, dear reader, receiving a copy which comes to pieces is very small indeed. It is a hazard that may occur with any publishing firm and booksellers will replace the volume immediately.

CLIFFORD HA WINS

Immunology of the Gut Ciba Foundation Symposium 46 (new series). (Pp. 384; illustrated; $28.75.) Excerpta Medica: Amsterdam. 1977. This book records a highly successful Ciba Symposium on the immunology of the gut, combining comprehensive reviews of a range of topics, each followed by stimulating, critical, and individualistic discussions. All the contributors present original work, some of which is unpublished, ranging from the structure and function of the normal immunological apparatus of the gut to bacterial and parasitic infections, immunodeficiency disorders, inflammatory bowel disease, and coeliac disease.

Cebra and Gowans and their colleagues provide new data, extending their early observations on secretory IgA and lymphocyte homing to the gut respectively. The role of secretory immunoglobulins in the control of bacterial and parasitic infections and antigen exclusion is examined by several groups, both in animals and man, including the secretory immune response as well as a presentation by Ferguson and Macdonald of cell-mediated responses. There is interesting recent information on gut sensitisation stimulating specific secretory antibodies against bacteria and food proteins in human milk.

Highly topical sections include current views on the role of the eosinophil by Beeson and the immunology of bacterial plaque in the mouth by Lehner. Excellent reviews of alpha-chain disease by Seligmann and immunodeficiency and the gut by Katz and Rosen are of particular practical value to clinical gastroenterologists.

The papers by Pepys on inflammatory bowel disease and Booth and colleagues on coeliac disease provoke interesting comment and discussion from the basic immunologists present.

Throughout, there is a wealth of information, well-referenced and produced in a readable form with useful illustrations and tables. The Symposium is chaired by Lachmann and appropriately dedicated to the late Joseph Heremans, who made such important contributions to this rapidly developing area of gastroenterology.

R. WRIGHT