Books

Diseases of the gastrointestinal tract and liver By David JC Shearman and Niall DC Finlayson. (Pp. 974; illustrated; £32 until 1 October 1982, then £37). Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone. 1982.

The qualities of this outstanding book derive from the attitude of the authors: 'It is not surprising that many believe the general textbook outmoded, as it cannot reflect the latest views on every topic. We subscribe, on the contrary, to the view that a comprehensive text is particularly valuable . . . as it provides an accessible overview for those training in the specialty and for those in clinical practice.' What becomes clear on reading this book is that it has a sense of balance which is largely or even completely absent from the conventional multi-author text. When each one of 50 or even 100 contributors has only a few thousand words at his disposal, each peddles his wares as hard as he can, and it is often difficult for the novice to sort out what is established and what is merely a current fashion. 'The latest views on every topic' have a disconcerting habit of becoming rapidly outmoded by the next set of latest views.

All but about 150 pages of this book have been written by the two authors, the remainder being contributed by specialist colleagues, mainly surgeons. The result is a comprehensive and balanced account of current gastroenterology, both in terms of clinical practice and in clinical and basic science. It is well written and well produced with black-and-white illustrations which are entirely adequate; wisely, the authors have avoided using endoscopic illustrations which require colour, but the quality of production is such that illustrations of histology do not suffer. More important, the book is very well organised. Not only are references comprehensive (and mercifully not Vancouverised; the name of the first authors and the year of publication are given in parentheses rather than an unhelpful numeral) but references to key subject reviews are attached to appropriate subheadings, thus directing the reader to the kind of reference he requires.

Obviously, different readers will find meat for criticism. The deliberate omission of paediatric gastroenterology on the grounds that this is a matter for paediatricians rather than gastroenterologists is controversial, and this is a matter that should be reconsidered before a further edition is prepared. The decision to have an introductory chapter on tests and procedures is welcome, but here the authors are inconsistent: for example, the penta-gastrin gastric function test is included in this

chapter, but tests for gastric emptying, such as the gamma camera scan, are deferred to another chapter. Oesophageal manometry is fully described but there is no mention of gastroduodenal manometry, which has proved to be of value in the diagnosis of gastroparesis and intestinal pseudo-obstruction. Ultimately, the choice of material for inclusion in such a book must be the personal decision of the authors, and it would be impossible to provide total satisfaction for every reader.

The fact remains that this is a magnificent achievement. It is informative, stimulating, and comprehensive; moreover, it is readable. The personal cost to the authors of undertaking this labour is documented in the preface; one may hope that they and their long-suffering families will be consoled by the success of the outcome. It is hard to think of anyone interested in the specialty, from house officer to consultant, who would not benefit from having access to this book. And it is worth pointing out that the way to make sure that the book is accessible is to own a copy.

DAVID WINGATE

Clinical use of drugs in patients with kidney and liver disease Edited by RJ Anderson and RW Schrier. (Pp. 348; illustrated; £26.75). Philadelphia: WB Saunders. 1981.

This American multi-author book begins by outlining the pharmacological principles necessary for understanding the methods of altering drug dosage in patients with kidney and liver disease. Then follow eight chapters on drug-induced disorders of the kidneys and liver – topics which are well discussed in several other recent books. The second half of the book concerns the use of individual drugs in patients with kidney or liver disease. Some of these chapters are very helpful, and enable the clinician to make sensible decisions on prescribing; a few take unduly long to say that too little is known. A tabular appendix gives pharmacokinetic data and dosing recommendations in patients with renal or hepatic dysfunction for 160 drugs commonly used in the USA.

The book seems aimed primarily at clinical nephrologists and hepatologists. It contains important and useful material, but, apart from the tables in the appendix, this is not easy to use in everyday prescribing. The book is certainly of value for background reading and reference, and each chapter cites many original papers. It is solidly produced, and likely to outlive its contents.

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