Books


Medical fashions are said to change. Superficially this may appear so but in reality, practice changes with experience, the discovery of new drugs and new technologies among other factors. Liver and biliary disease is no exception. Shunt operations are less frequent and local transoesophageal variceal injections are now common, postcholecystectomy stones are removed with a Dormier basket and liver abscesses are drained percutaneously and not surgically. Diagnostic procedures have not only changed accordingly but have in many ways been the spearhead of these new treatments.

The expectations of clinicians have altered accordingly. Diagnostic tests must not only have an accuracy approaching 100% (and preferably even greater!) but must be rapid, hazard free, cheap, non-invasive and freely available. Furthermore the diagnostic test must also have a therapeutic potential particularly as a means of performing percutaneous aspiration and cytology procedures. Ultrasonography, while not quite meeting all these criteria, is at present the front runner. The major drawback is the difficulty clinicians have in interpreting the results and in assessing the validity of an individual examination. Isotope imaging is least successful as an overall diagnostic tool. If only computed tomography and magnetic resonance imaging were freely available and inexpensive; however, ‘biliary’ ERCP remains a technique for specialist centres.

With ultrasonography gall bladder and biliary disease can be diagnosed accurately, space occupying lesions can be located, abscesses can be drained, fatty livers diagnosed and needle cytology undertaken, but alas, gas and bone continue as insurmountable obstructions and ‘tissue characterisation’ remains unaccomplished.

While no doubt the symposium itself was interesting and informative, this volume does not entirely reflect the modern approach. It is heavily weighted towards isotope imaging, is persuasive for using intravenous cholangiography and has only one chapter on computed tomography. The sections on ultrasonography are, however, extremely interesting. On the whole, and with a few notable exceptions such as the chapter by Dr J Ell, this book is therefore more like a catalogue of methods available in liver and biliary imaging than a realistic guide to modern usage.


The book seeks to provide insight into some important aspects of ulcer disease. Four chapters are devoted to clinical topics. The book starts with an analysis of the statistical basis for diagnostic decisions. Very interesting, but before application, the statistics need elaboration, for example, by mention of confidence limits. The technique should certainly not be used for ‘blind’ treatment, as advocated. The chapters on endoscopy and surgical treatment are all right, but are severely restricted in length, so that important aspects receive little or no mention. The chapter on medical treatment is regrettably out of date, with only 15 of 97 references since 1980 and none later than 1982. In a topic like the medical treatment of duodenal and gastric ulcers, that is out of touch.

The remainder of the book comprises five chapters devoted to pathophysiology and one each to pathology and the gastric circulation. Both of the latter chapters are short and the topics are, therefore, better reviewed elsewhere. It is particularly unfortunate that the chapter on pathology omits reference to the very important recent findings during experimental ulcer formation. The main bulk of the book (one third) is devoted to the guest editor’s own chapter on the pathophysiology of ulcers, with 700 useful references. The expectedly competent chapter on the pathophysiological aspects of the secretion of acid satisfactorily emphasises the very important Scandinavian contributions to the topic but does not address the title of the chapter – that is, whether hydrochloric acid is, actually, an ‘aggressive factor’. Dr Samloff’s review of pepsin and its relationship to ulcer disease is masterly and is, in my opinion, the best chapter in the book. The topic of the ‘mucus – bicarbonate barrier’ has been reviewed and rereviewed frequently in the past few years, so that it is difficult to write anything that is new. Although the relevance of the subject to peptic ulceration is not at all obvious, however, this very readable chapter is a satisfactory summary of the current state of knowledge. The second of the chapters on ‘resistance factors’ is devoted to ‘cellular resistance’. This chapter comprises in part repeat (albeit less satisfactory) of the

M J TURNER

L KREEL
previous chapter on the ‘mucus-bicarbonate barrier’; in part repeat of the section on gastric circulation; and actually deals with ‘cellular’ aspects of ‘resistance’ (to acute damage by noxious chemicals) in only two paragraphs. ‘Ulcer’ is mentioned, in passing, four times and not in the context of the title of the chapter.

In summary the book is a reaction to recent diagnostic and therapeutic advances, and therefore to an increased interest in ulcer disease. Its defects are a reminder that our basic knowledge about the function and the diseases of the upper alimentary tract is still grossly inadequate. For those who can read between lines and beyond full stops, the book provides a satisfactory background for further study.

K G WORMSLEY


This is a well produced and interesting book but is a bit of a mixture, combining areas of pathophysiology such as bile pigment metabolism and the solubility of bilirubin in bile, with chapters on sphincterotomy, chemical dissolution of stones and the like, and only seven chapters on intrahepatic stones. The associated chapters are by well known authors from Europe and the United States and are excellent, but the information they contain can be found elsewhere. The intrahepatic calculus is chiefly a phenomenon of the Far East, and so the specific chapters are therefore written by authors from Japan and Hong Kong and drawn mainly on the local literature, although to read more widely it does not appear to be necessary to know Japanese!

Intrahepatic stones are fascinating and poorly understood, but this book will be of value chiefly to those with a particular interest in gall stones and who have enough money.

R P H THOMPSON


This book is drawn from the experience of the Metropolitan Medical Center in Minneapolis. It has some of the defects of a multi-author book, but in general is well informed and suitably illustrated to be of considerable benefit to surgeons involved with the treatment of morbid obesity. It covers the whole field of technical surgery in some detail, and though one might quibble with some of the philosophy, it is to some extent a history of their experience and a confirmation of their views on current practice.

The text is well written, and the topics are covered in logical sequence. This is principally a book for the library, though it should also find a place in the personal collection of any surgeon involved with so-called bariatric surgery.

C G CLARK

Books received

Liver biopsy diagnoses and reports. SNOMED Codes ICD-9-CM. Codes nomenclature and terminology By J Ludwig. (Pp 156; not illustrated; £34.75) Basel, Switzerland: Karger, 1984.


News

BSG Research Award 1985

A three page summary of personal research work is invited by the Award Committee of the British Society of Gastroenterology who will recommend to Council the recipient of the 1985 Award. A bibliography may also be submitted if desired. The Award consists of a medal and £100 prize. Entrants must be 40 years or less (on 31 December 1985) but need not be a member of the BSG. All (or a substantial part) of the work must have been performed in the UK or Eire. The recipient will be required to deliver a 40 minute lecture at the Plenary Session of the Spring meeting in 1986. Applications (six copies) should be made to: The Honorary Secretary, BSG, The Rayne Institute, 5 University Street, London WC1E 6JJ. BY 1 DECEMBER 1985.

Correction

Abstract F 76: D W Bullimore, Gut May issue. Sentence beginning ‘Ten alcoholics and non-alcoholics were used in the licensing industry’ should have read ‘...were employed in the licensing industry’.