Difficult decisions in digestive diseases.  

This book contains 49 chapters written almost entirely by physicians or surgeons practising in North America (except Dame Sheila Sherlock), and covers the oesophagus (five sections), stomach and duodenum (six sections), pancreas (six), liver and biliary tract (seven), small intestine (five) and large intestine 13 plus seven on oesophageal varices. An immediate problem arises in deciding what is a difficult decision; difficult for lack of evidence on what works, or controversial because opinions differ, or difficult because there are several options. Content can always be criticised, but the decision element is not always obvious from the titles; thus ‘Hepato renal syndrome: what are the new concepts.’ (Not a matter of decision but one of knowledge). On the other hand the chapter on relief of chronic pancreatic pain gives a clear decision tree with a progressive set of management options.

The practising physician is likely to want a set of guiding rules for a wide variety of problems, and here Grant Thompson’s chapter on the chronic abdomen is a model of clarity and brevity. Elsewhere there is too much flabby writing. ‘Emphasis on radionuclide scanning should be viewed in the context of practical consideration,’ ‘the patient who truly passes gas with excessive frequency (which I equate with excessive pressure) presumably has some abnormality.’ It is not easy to urge this book contains many good practical advice that is not as easy to find as it should be. Shorter chapters with contrasted options considered would help greatly. Nevertheless, there are sections, reading and reviewing, such as that on polyps in the colon. Briefer and more general coverage would have helped to convert a scholarly discursive treatise to the volume of practical help that readers probably would prefer.

M J S LANGMAN


That this text is now nine volumes on is testimony to its value to the practising clinician, at which it is aimed. The purpose – to digest the past year’s original papers and present important new findings in ways that carry clinical meaning – is, as usual, accomplished. The sections covering as they do the main areas of liver disease range from hepatitis to liver transplantation and hepatobiliary imaging. One addition this year, and a very worthwhile one, is the section covering the new Japanese literature on the use of cryoablation by Kunio Okuda. There can be no better person to put into perspective the extraordinary amount of basic and clinical research work going on in Japan at present. The chapter on cirrhosis, written again by Preiss and Reichen, makes excellent reading, covering as it does the latest on oestrogen metabolism in a book of alcoholics, survival curves for compensated and decompensated cirrhosis, so needed with liver transplantation being increasingly applied in therapy. Hal Conn’s chapter on the complications of portal hypertension – again the longest chapter in the book – includes a very critical evaluation of endoscopic sclerotherapy and other forms of treatment for oesophageal varices. Molecular biology of the liver by Sherman has a very useful section on the significance of HBV DNA measurement in serum as well as glioma – into the future of gene therapy as applied to correction of congenital metabolic liver disorders. It is appropriate that this volume should be dedicated to the late Bill Summerskill for he was really the first to show what could be achieved when basic scientists and clinical doctors get together in the study of human disease.

ROGER WILLIAMS


Gastroenterologists, and others interested in the potential importance of H pylori will find meaningful and easy reading with this book. The book has over 200 pages, in 15 chapters, plus a preface, foreword, introduction, and a summarising perspective. The authors, predominately from the USA, were carefully selected to represent a broad spectrum of opinions, and there is a virtual absence of duplication in the presentations, a sign of careful editing.

One can go through the entire text without discomfort, and come away without being overburdened with facts, but with an understanding of why there is no unanimous concerning the need to treat H pylori, nor how the organism is spread, about the need for biopsy, or even the relation of the infection to duodenal pathology. Also clear will be the present urgent need to develop cooperative therapeutic trial protocols, and to evaluate ways to maximise the use of combined diagnostic procedures.

As stated in the preface, ‘the volume begins with historical and introductory details, then proceeds with information pertinent to the microbiology, epidemiology, and pathophysiology of C pylori infection. From these bases, the text continues with an examination of the methods used to diagnose the infection, the relevant treatment modalities and their rationales, and information on more recently discovered gastric organisms.’

I particularly enjoyed the personal narrative of Barry Marshall, who describes how he pursued the leads that led ultimately to the culture of H pylori, and the partially personal narratives concerning accidental and experimental human infections, by Arthur Morris and Gordon Nicholson. The pictures and graphic materials are of high quality, and the Tables may be easily adapted for teaching. The references, in keeping with a book concerning a rapidly developing field, are mostly of recent work, some from 1989.

This is a well balanced and up to date review, useful as a background from which to plan diagnostic, clinical, and therapeutic decisions about Helicobacter pylori. Be aware, however, as you read the newest literature, that since mid-1989, the organism has been called Helicobacter pylori.

ROGER A FELDMAN


Is there an ideal book for a gastroenterologist? If so, what qualities would it possess? Well, it would be both erudite and useful. Not easy, you might think; I agree. How about light-weight, pocket size, and relatively cheap into the bargain? Near to impossible.

And yet, here it is. This slim but tightly packed volume on the therapy of gastrointestinal disease comes to us from Bethesda Naval Hospital; possibly it is a survival device that has enabled the writer with his 23 collaborators, mostly from the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences into providing a text that is consistent in excellence across the spectrum of gastrointestinal pharmacology. There are six main sections to the book, and these include not only the expected categories such as acid suppression and the inflamed bowel, but also acute infections and procedure related drugs. Within these sections each chapter deals with a narrow class of drugs, including not only a description of the pharmacology, mode of action, and indications, but also an annotated bibliography. It is a very much up to date; it encompasses newer drugs such as omeprazole, the two new nitidines, and cisapride.

It might well become the equivalent, for the gastroenterologist, of the Guide Michelin for the traveller in France, expect that unlike the latter, it is pocket sized (well, a large pocket, anyway, or perhaps even a handbag . . . ). One can only hope that subsequent editions – which there will surely be – do not suffer from the progressive copulence that characterises all the better books. Anyway, as they say in another context, ‘don’t leave home without it.’

DAVID WINGATE


This is an excellent book. Our knowledge of paediatric liver disease has been rapidly expanding over the last decade, and with the development of liver transplantation has at last come of age. Dr Tanner has had a major clinical interest in the field for many years, and has himself made very significant contributions, particularly in the areas of Indian childhood