Topics of essentially practical interest have been selected for succinct description and discussion. By avoiding the encyclopedic approach, controversial topics have been highlighted.

Who, therefore, would find the book of interest? Obviously the working surgeon with a broad knowledge of the field would encounter certain topics often neglected by the largest encyclopedias. The trainee, preparing for postgraduate examinations, will find the surgery of this field recast in a way different from the conventional textbook. An interesting and stimulating read, easy to take up and put down, at £27 this book is not a good buy for the individual and at best would be recommended for a library which is well funded and already possesses the classic text monographs in this field.

ROBERT SHIELDS


The book is aimed primarily at medical students. It is concise and readable, with different aspects of gastrointestinal physiology divided into easily digestible chapters. The formula is a tried and tested one, with separate chapters dealing with motor and secretory function on a regional basis. In addition, there are two chapters on regulation by hormones and nerves and a final chapter on the sphincteric circulation. The book is well illustrated with simple line drawings, flow diagrams, and tables. Although the artwork is basic in nature, this is probably an advantage for conceptual understanding and suits the needs of the target readership. In terms of depth of coverage there is little more than one finds in some general medical physiology textbooks. In its favour, however, it has as its source material Physiology of the gastrointestinal tract (1987: New York, Raven Press) also edited by L R Johnson. This has ensured that the book is in touch with present concepts. Clinical material is used to illustrate physiological concepts and most chapters contain a section on clinical tests. The contents and direction have therefore been well chosen for basic science students but the book lacks depth for the more serious gastrointestinal physiologist.

D GRUNDY


The authors are to be congratulated on their choice of the original topic of non-responders in gastroenterology. Unfortunately, presumably because 'the Editors decided not to add to their burden with strict rules regarding the size and structure of their articles', the experts selected, many of whom are 'long-standing personal friends', have mostly ignored their brief. They have instead given a textbook review of the topic with little on the size of the problem or meaningful summaries, with further investigations, management plans to bring the patient into remission, and evidence of trials of the efficacy of such treatment, all of which the reader has the right to expect.

Moreover the pace of advances in our understanding of pathophysiology, pathogenesis, and pharmacology of gastrointestinal disease is so fast that to make some of the chapters outdated even as they appear in print. Thus, omeprazole has only 30 lines in 16 pages on refractory reflux esophagitis, and only two of 10 pages on H2 antagonist resistant ZE syndrome. Cisapride has one citation in 10 pages on idiopathic constipation. The editors' 39 page chapter on duodenal ulcer devotes nine lines to Helicobacter pylori. No recommendations are made for the investigation (such as serum gastrin and acid studies) of posturgical recurrent ulcers.

Honourable exceptions are S Domshchke's resistant pancreatic steatorrhoea, Howdle's algorithm for coeliac non-responders, andMaybeo and Souhendra, who confidently conclude there is no patient with oesophageal varices who is calcareant to... aggressive... sclerotherapy... and the use of... Histocryl-Blau' (n-butyl 2 cyanoacrylate). The chapters follow in the usual caudal direction from burning mouth to solitary rectal ulcer via the liver (ascites, itching) and pancreas. Perhaps the wisest words in this book are by Tytgstrup: Most studies 'are casuistic rather than therapeutic trials... physicians try many different types of treatment, and it is not surprising that the capriciousness of the reactions occasionally leads to a small series of favourable results, which is then published'. Because of this 'publicity bias', 'unless a completely effective and safe therapy becomes available, there is no alternative to randomised clinical trials to quantitate the problem of non-responders, to decide if they have special clinical characteristics, and to select combinations for optimal treatment of non-responders'.

J H BARON

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BOOKS RECEIVED


