Infections of the gastrointestinal tract.


Yet another massive tome on infection, this time directed solely to the gastrointestinal tract! Ten parts, 97 chapters, 162 contributors – all but North America, and the weight is 3·8 kg.

The editors begin their preface (to a volume that they have endeavoured to make ‘comprehensive and practical’): ‘Gastrointestinal infection is a major cause of death and disease, particularly in the developing world;’ absolutely true, but surprisingly only one of the contributors (from Peru) resides there! The goal (of their labours) is, they state, to provide ‘a comprehensive source that combines the scientific basis and the art of medicine relevant to enteric infections’; while also emphasising that ‘the clinician who understands the new technologies ... becomes their master, not their slave’ they also write that ‘there are many opportunities for simple, low-technology, low-cost approaches for dealing with this group of infections. To keep the text to reasonable length (27), a concentration of interest (?), diagnosis, and focus, hepatic infections are not included and should, the reader is informed, ‘... be treated as a separate subject’. The intended readership consists of: ‘the healthcare practitioner, the clinical investigator, and all who seek not only the latest clinical details but also an understanding of the breadth and limitations of our knowledge of enteric infections’.

Part I focuses on the history and epidemiological aspects (in both developed and developing countries) of diarrhoeal disease; not surprisingly there is a good deal on cholera, and also the impact of gastrointestinal infection on the course of malaria and other infections, both well-trodden paths! Anatomy, physiology, and immunology are covered in Parts II and III; normal flora, mucins, adherence factors, fluids and electrolyte transport, mucosal IgA, secretory J and the response to enteric pathogens, cellular immune mechanisms, and immunopathology of mast cells are some of the subjects tackled. In Parts IV to VI major clinical syndromes are considered – both in the immunocompetent and immunocompromised subject; the coverage starts with food poisoning and travellers’ diarrhoea, and meanders along enteric fever, tropical sprue, appendicitis, diverticulitis, peritonitis, and infective endocarditis. Both well-trodden paths! – bowel disease; there is also a great deal on Helicobacter pylori (53 pages) and HIV infection. Microbiology, epidemiology, and pathophysiological considerations form the basis (for Part VII; infectious, viral, and parasitic (protozoan and helminthic) infections are dealt with in this order. It is noteworthy that mycobacterial disease of the gastrointestinal tract (including Mycobacterium tuberculosis – which is arguably the world’s most common bacterial disease) is allocated 19 pages, whereas that on Whipple’s disease gets 18! Perhaps the editors should have taken more time with balance and prior-

**BOOK REVIEWS**


Books exist describing untoward reactions of the liver to various drugs. The largest and most comprehensive is by H J Zimmerman (Hepatotoxicity: The Adverse Effects of Drugs and Other Chemicals on the Liver, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1978) but it is out of date. The book ed. by B C Strickler (Drug-Induced Liver Injury, 2nd edition; Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1992) is justifiably in wide use. However, the drugs scene, particularly in relation to hepatotoxicity, is changing rapidly and this book from Australia, edited by Geoffrey C Farrell, is both comprehensive and timely.

The first part describes underlying concepts of drug metabolism and hepatic reactions to drugs. The role of the liver in drug metabolism is contributed by Michael Murray and biochemical mechanisms by G C Farrell. Immunological mediation of drug reactions is discussed by Ian R Mackay, perhaps Australia’s most outstanding clinical immunologist. Pdela M Hall contributes an excellent chapter on histopathology, which includes 54 figures, many of them in colour.

Various drugs are discussed under the headings of chemical factors, clinical features, hepatic-histology and course, outcome, and prevention. An up to date table covering 29 pages summarises the effects of each drug alphabetically. I could not find any omissions. Even ecstasy, a currently much discussed hepatotoxicity is annotated. This table, on floppy disc, is available free of charge on request by those who purchase the book.