balanced. In two of the contributions, however, the 10,000 odd words are unaccompanied by any tables or illustrations, which makes for a rather demanding read. Indeed, the book is generally somewhat dull and this is a shame because it occurs to me that the major justification nowadays for publishing series of ‘advances’ in book form is that they should give a coherent, topical, and broad perspective in a readable manner that review journals (such as *Current Opinion*) fail to do because of the intensely focused nature of their subject matter. There are honourable successes here but maybe the present format, which has barely changed over the years, is in need of a pretty substantial rethink.


These two booklets were produced originally in the United States of America for the interested patient. They deal in considerable detail with aspects of peptic ulcer disease, oesophagitis, inflammatory bowel disease, the irritable bowel syndrome, and colorectal cancer. The topics are dealt with in some depth and certainly can provide the type of information that is not generally available to patients in this country. The information that is provided is somewhat marred by the personal views of the author. On a number of occasions he discusses his approach to treatment, which has been developed over many years. Some of the approaches to investigation and treatment are rather different to those that would be routinely followed in the United Kingdom. These imperfections, however, do not remove the value of the book as an aid to those patients who want to enquire more deeply into the diagnosis and treatment of their disease.

We are clearly moving into an era when patients wish to know more and more about the cause, management, and treatment of their diseases. When doctors are obligated to provide the information that our patients require. We have a duty to ensure that it is accurate and can be easily understood. Traditionally in Britain, much of the information we give to patients is brief and in a comparatively simple format. A number of clinicians have believed we should make available more detailed information. With the emergence of self-help groups, the Patient’s Charter, and a heightened awareness of the problems of medical care generated by the media, it is important that quality information on disease is available.

It is against this background that we need to assess the value of these two booklets. Undoubtedly they do provide a level of information that is in general not available in this country for patients with intestinal diseases. The information, however, is slanted towards the American clinical scene. I also have some problems in the way that many conditions are brought together within each book. It is unlikely that somebody with inflammatory bowel disease is going to benefit from reading about polyps and carcinoma of the colon as well as diverticulosis and food allergies. Although there are interesting links for the clinician, I suspect that the bringing together of all of these conditions within one book may well increase anxiety in an inappropriate way. Clinicians have traditionally felt, however, that telling patients more about their disease will alarm them and so this component of mine may be regarded as reactionary. My only other serious criticism of these two books is their cost. £10.00 will ensure many patients who could benefit from them will fail to make the purchase and perhaps as practising doctors we should develop libraries of such books that can be loaned to patients attending our clinics.

J F MAYBERRY


The first edition of *The Esophagus* appeared in 1992. When the second edition appears only three years later, it may be presumed that the book has been considered a publishing success. The first edition was indeed an excellent textbook: this one is truly outstanding. Beginning with a chapter on functional anatomy and physiology, the 40 subsequent chapters written by around 50 authors, mostly American, deal with just about everything concerning the oesophagus that the clinician will wish to know. The orientation of the whole text is unequivocally towards the clinician while the subject matter is reviewed comprehensively and in depth. Like most book reviewers, I suppose, my own scrutiny has included looking up a number of rarities in the index, to see if they are mentioned and to see what is said, and looking at the major topics to make a very personal judgment of the way they are handled. This book passed all my tests with ease. It was particularly gratifying to find that with controversial issues, the authors have not ducked out of making clear, practical recommendations after sensible, realistic analysis of the information available. Sometimes this information is conflicting, or is otherwise inadequate for making well founded decisions, but in clinical practice, these decisions must nevertheless be made. The editor and authors have dealt with this difficulty admirably.

It is hard to find fault with this book. The only obvious defect, in my opinion, is the quality of the endoscopic illustrations which, being derived from different centres, show variations of colour, brightness, and clarity that cause confusion. This is comparatively unimportant, however, as no-one is likely to use this book as an endoscopy atlas. Its merit lies in the integration of scientific information, analysis, and clinical wisdom, which is potentially helpful to anyone involved in the care of patients with oesophageal disease and will be of greatest value to physicians and surgeons in gastroenterological practice who sometimes seek an expert opinion on an oesophageal topic. Having this book available is like having 50 experts on immediate call. We bought the first edition of *The Esophagus* for our departmental library. I think it may take me some time to decide whether my review copy of the second edition should join it there. Meanwhile it will just remain conveniently to hand for my personal use.

R C HEADING

NOTES

Subscriptions

The editor has limited funds available to offer free subscriptions of the journal for one year to libraries in Eastern Europe who would otherwise have great difficulty in obtaining access to the journal. Please send requests or suggestions, giving full addresses to: The Editor, Gut Editorial Office, BMJ Publishing Group, BMA Publishing Group, BMA House, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JR.

Cross Sectional Imaging

This five day seminar will be held in Hyatt Regency St John Resort, US Virgin Islands on 26 February-1 March 1996. Further information from: Janice Ford, Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, 3400 Spruce Street, 1 Silverstein Building, Philadelphia, PA 19104. Tel: 215 662 7825; Fax 215 349 5925.

Pediatric Gastroenterology and Nutrition

The 5th Asian Pan Pacific Congress of Pediatric Gastroenterology and Nutrition will be held on 10–13 April 1997 in Taipei, Taiwan. Further information from: Professor Mei-Hwei Chang, MD, Department of Pediatrics, National Taiwan University Hospital, No 7, Chung-Shan S Road, Taipei, Taiwan. Fax: 886–2 3938871.