

book reviews

Horizons in Medicine, Number 13

Edited by Stephanie Amiel. Royal College of Physicians, 2002. 429pp. £25.00.

This series has been consistently of high standard and is based on the well-established annual Advanced Medicine Conferences held at the Royal College of Physicians. The 2001 Conference was arranged by Professor Stephanie Amiel and in her preface to this volume she declared it her wish that it should be judged 'the best ever'. Whether it was I cannot say because I was not present, but if this book is a true reflection of it, it might have been. It is first class. The subjects chosen are topical and relevant to the practice of internal medicine, the writing is clear, the diagrams and illustrations make sense, the print is easy to read and the editing exemplary.

It opens with a clear account of the management of patients resuscitated after cardiac arrest (the title 'failed sudden cardiac death' is a trifle awkward, but one knows what is meant), there are excellent and highly important accounts of betablockers in the management of heart failure, unstable angina and of psychological factors in heart disease. Then important advances in the approach to inflammatory bowel disease and portal hypertension, and a splendidly clear explanation of apoptosis (organised cell death) in the gut and its relevance to cancer. We learn how molecular biology is showing the way to the development of new therapeutic approaches using the intriguing concept of the 'Trojan horse strategy'.

There are new thrusts into the management of chronic renal failure, now a huge national problem (one hundred new cases per million population increasing at 8% a year), and the editor gives a masterly survey of pathways set to improve the treatment of diabetes estimated to affect some three million people by 2010,

using new and anticipated insulin preparations in order to mimic human physiology and do away with tiresome diets and other restrictions. She explains how resources are so limited that we are well behind Germany in quality of diabetic control using the insulins we have.

We move to molecular targeting in chronic myeloid leukaemia offering a realistic prospect of cure, then right across the spectrum of medicine to a refreshingly sensible and comprehensibly researched and philosophical account of the evidence for and against there being a defined 'Gulf War syndrome'. Under infectious disease there is a depressing survey of what needs to be done in order to deal with methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus, then steps required to rein back the problem of sexually transmitted disease and a good update on the continuing threat posed by the meningococcus.

There is an excellent review explaining the increasingly recognised role of inflammation in asthma and its treatment, an important survey of the ever present problem of falls in the elderly, authoritative accounts of where we are in colonic and breast cancer and near the end a thought-provoking chapter on advances that have been made in the management of cystic fibrosis and how 'success' can open up even more intransigent and unforeseen problems and dilemmas.

It is an excellent read, less than 450 pages to be commended strongly to all engaged in internal medicine without regard to specialty. It represents essential reading to SHOs and Registrars in medicine, they will learn, yes, but, much more important, be stimulated and excited by prospects for the future and should lift their spirits over the deadening influence of constant bureaucratic and political interference in their professional prospects. Even Ministers, current and aspiring, with no biological background, were they scan through it, must quickly see why medical costs seem exasperatingly to rise exponentially. Lastly, it will earn approval from the evidenced-based medicine industry.

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