

BOOKS / BOEKE

Getting into Residency: A Guide for Medical Students

3rd ed. By Kenneth V. Iserson. Pp. xviii + 431. \$28,95. Tucson: Galen Press. 1993. ISBN 1-883620-10-4.

The question of where to do your house job, internship or residency is a major consideration for all medical students. Not much help is available on this subject, and decisions are often made on limited information. Determinants such as speciality choice, family commitments and finance weigh heavily on making a choice that will undoubtedly influence future career paths.

Professor Iserson's book, from the USA, on these matters is helpful, containing a wealth of detail and advice to aspirant applicants for training posts. There is much common sense about how to reach a decision, obtain information, prepare applications and handle an interview. On this general level it is recommended to students, but suffers on almost all other levels in that it is just not transferable to the South African situation.

The chapters on choosing a speciality from one's own preferences would have universal appeal, but the advice on 'paper work' and interview techniques would find more application to postgraduate students. I recommend that medical libraries keep a copy of the book and every medical students' council have one available as a reference. It is not sufficiently pertinent for general reading.

Its presence and popularity in the USA serves as a reminder to all South African medical schools that our responsibilities do not end with factual input for our students. They require communication skills, both written and verbal. We need to advise, counsel and encourage our students to discuss career choices and decisions with their teachers and mentors.

Perhaps it is time for a South African production on the subject?

A. KENT

Molecular Biology of Digestive Disease

Ed. by Philip Quirke. Pp. vii + 116. £15. London: BMJ. 1994. ISBN 0-7279-0827-8.

This book is a welcome exposition of the state of molecular biology as it pertains to gastroenterology.

Molecular biology is perhaps the most exciting area of medical exploration at present. Its possibilities and implications are still being defined, but meanwhile this small book reviews the state of the art for the practising clinician. It describes the underlying rationale and current techniques used to unravel the genetic material available in all cells.

The most immediate and obvious use of genetic recognition is in identifying hereditary disease due to chromosomal changes. More important to the practising clinician is the section on the identification of infective agents. The method may identify a single infecting organism in a specimen even if the agent is non-viable. This may take hours as opposed to the weeks currently required to identify organisms such as *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. Diseases such as Crohn's disease may prove to be due to an as yet unknown infective agent, as was the case with Whipple's disease recently. Identifying patients with a susceptibility to gastrointestinal malignancies might be the next most important contribution of the method and this is well developed in dedicated chapters.

Finally, the fascinating role of gene therapy is discussed. This is where the staggering possibilities of gene manipulation and replacement leave the non-molecular biologist in awe. This book is highly recommended to those with little

knowledge of this burgeoning field and who would like to catch a glimpse of the diagnostic techniques of the future.

J. P. WRIGHT

Parkinson's Disease

Ed. by Merton Sandler. Pp. ix + 65. £12/US\$24. London: John Libbey, 1993. ISBN 0-86196-404-7.

A symposium in 1992 in Munich (FRG) dealt with current pharmacotherapies in Parkinson's disease (PD). This book reports some of the contributions, but is already out of date and does not adequately deal with other treatment options such as foetal transplantation, psychiatric support, strategies to deal with levodopa complications, complications of dopamine agonist regimens and new routes to administer drugs. Being multi-authored, the standard of the text is variable, with three chapters on current approaches to therapy and one on dopamine cell neuroprotection.

Clearly, neurodegenerative diseases such as PD may benefit from strategies that limit cellular damage, but a major issue not dealt with is identification of the earliest stages of disease so as to best implement these prophylactic strategies. Also, a reappraisal of the role of genetic factors in PD is relevant. This may in turn allow identification of an 'at risk' subset of people who may also benefit from cell-preservation strategies. Dopamine agonist therapy may be of benefit in this regard, as may monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitors or reduced cumulative long-term overall levodopa. Only pergolide is discussed in this vein. There is, however, a useful chapter on pergolide pharmacology and how to initiate therapy with this drug, the newest widely available dopamine agonist. Pergolide is the only dopamine agonist dealt with, and little is mentioned of MAO B inhibitors.

In summary, this book provides little reason to rush to the bookshop, since recent reviews in the general medical journals deal better with emerging treatments in PD. Research today focuses upon possible aetiological factors to better understand the pathology and design treatment strategy.

J. A. TEMLETT

Brain Work and Mental Activity: Quantitative Studies With Radioactive Tracers

Ed. by N. A. Lassen, D. A. Ingvar, M. A. Raichle and L. Friberg. PP. 446. Illustrated. Copenhagen: Munksgaard. 1991. ISBN 87-16-10698-9.

Although the structure of the brain is a relatively well-defined subject, the manner in which the brain actually processes information is not. This book contains the proceedings of the 31st Alfren Benzon Symposium of August 1990, and presents the attempts to link regional brain work to functional activity and the methods used to this end.

The text is neither introductory nor comprehensive but, in the nature of a symposium, concentrates on concise but detailed reviews of current research. So, although the subject matter is interesting and topical, I found myself quickly bogged down in the finer aspects, but did derive much of value. While undoubtedly an authoritative and well-presented account of current thinking in a complex field, I feel that the book's appeal to a South African audience will be limited. Local constraints on manpower and funding, and the inaccessibility of facilities such as PET severely restrain research of this nature here. Despite this, libraries may want to purchase reference copies.

S. WOLBERG

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BOOKS / BOEKE

Guidelines for Quality Assurance Programmes for Blood Transfusion Services

Pp. IV + 50. (Available in English; French and Spanish in preparation). SFr.12/US\$10,80 (in developing countries SFr.8,40). Geneva: WHO. 1993. ISBN 92-4-154448-1. Order No. 1150392.

Modern transfusion medicine has shifted from pre-occupation with red cell serology to the production of blood components and fractions. The modern transfusion service has therefore almost been transformed to a small pharmaceutical industry. This change in focus requires that the activities of the service be subjected to stringent quality control and assurance programmes to ensure optimum performance and compliance with regulations.

Furthermore, the activities of a blood transfusion service span a range of activities that include the identification of potential blood donors, collection of blood, preparation of blood products, testing for transmissible diseases, maintaining computerised records and issuing of the safest and most appropriate products to patients.

This slim WHO guideline manual provides a well-balanced synopsis that should enable a transfusion service to establish an appropriate quality assurance programme. The manual adequately covers documentation, standard operating procedures, donor selection, laboratory activities, preparation of blood products, quality audit within the service, and a medical audit by a hospital transfusion committee.

We should note the need for a hospital transfusion committee, which can play an essential role in establishing and maintaining appropriate blood-ordering schedules, and in reviewing and upgrading current practices. The manual provides excellent guidelines for the terms of reference, functions and composition.

This is an excellent, most informative and very practical manual. All, or parts of it, will be of interest and applicable to everyone working in a transfusion service.

A. DU P. HEYNS

ABC of Alcohol

3rd ed. Ed. by Alex Paton. Pp. ix + 32. Illustrated. £10. London: BMJ. 1994. ISBN 0-7279-0812-X.

Alcohol abuse constitutes a serious medical dilemma in South Africa. It has been estimated that up to 50% of families have at some time suffered the consequences of alcohol abuse in the home. Physical, psychiatric and social problems in the alcoholic and his family place an enormous financial burden on the community. The primary care physician is often poorly equipped to deal with the issues of early detection, confrontation, motivation and treatment of the alcohol abuser.

The information contained in the *ABC of Alcohol* is simple though comprehensive. A section on definitions is followed by descriptions of drinking patterns, alcohol in the body and markers for early detection. The important material covering the aspects of confrontation and motivation should help the primary care physician to be more comfortable when consulted by an alcoholic.

The book concludes with the principles of management of the alcoholic in the consulting room and the referral options. It is easy to read and the illustrations are clear. The contents are applicable to our own community. Not only will the doctor in the primary care situation find this book beneficial, but paramedical therapists such as social workers

and occupational therapists will be able to apply the comprehensive material clinically.

W. P. PIENAAR

Atlas of Surgical Exposures of the Lower Extremity

By A. Masquelet, C. McCullough, R. Tubiana, I. Fyfe, L. Klenerman, E. Letournel. Pp. 414. Illustrated. London: Martin Dunitz. 1993. ISBN 1-85317-003-8.

In striking large format, this is as close as a medical book can get to coffee-table gloss. It should have brought forward the craftsmanship of the master surgeon, a demonstration of the subtleties, knacks, and 'tricks of the trade', which could add to the skills of the reader. Here it fails. It represents the average rather than the superb, and mostly shows the theoretical, without acting as a hand to guide the tyro's knife.

The artist has been gloriously successful, but I felt that many of the illustrated incisions were idealised, perhaps because they are taken from cadaveric demonstrations, some seemed to have been sketched later onto the drawing, others must be criticised as suboptimal.

The orthopaedic surgeon's dictum should be that 'incisions start with positions'. Firm directives about position (and drapes), essential preliminaries in planning orthopaedic incisions, are absent. The fundamentals of incision planning are curiously neglected. Some say that straight limb incisions are the stigma of the student.

What was positive? Assembling information about surgical access to the pelvic bones fulfils an overdue want. Emphasis on the cutaneous nerves, wrongfully neglected in the past, is pleasing.

But the gloss does not excuse the defects in this expensive publication.

J. P. DRIVER-JOWITT

Books received January/February/March 1994

A Matter of Choice: Abortion Law Reform in Apartheid South Africa. By June Cope. Pp. ix + 176. R45,99 (incl. vat). Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press. 1993. ISBN 0-86980-887-7.

Guidelines for Drinking-water Quality. Vol. 1. Recommendations. 2nd ed. WHO. Pp. x + 188. (Available in English; French and Spanish in preparation). SFr. 46/US\$41,40. Geneva: WHO. 1993. ISBN 92-4-154460-0. Order No. 1151404.

ABC of One to Seven. By H. B. Valman. 3rd ed. Pp. 144. Illustrated. £11. London: BMJ. 1993. ISBN 0-7279-0768-9.

Evaluation of Certain Food Additives and Contaminants. 41st Report of the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives. Technical Report Series No. 837. Pp. vii + 53. (Available in English; French and Spanish editions in preparation). SFr. 10/US\$9. Geneva: WHO. 1993. ISBN 92-4120837-6.

The ICD-10 Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders. Diagnostic Criteria for Research. WHO. Pp. xiii + 248. SFr. 50/US\$45. Geneva: WHO. 1993. ISBN 92-4-154455-4.

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