

centre of his universe and he theirs. I first got to meet him as a freshman medical student in 1958 and maintained a close personal relationship with him since. What struck me most about him was his bright intellect and warm and understanding personality. These attributes, combined with an abiding sense of personal and professional responsibility made him an astute clinician, a loving husband and father and a loyal friend. He had no airs, but derived boundless pleasure from his children on whom he doted. I often felt like his third son and am very grateful to him for showing me affection and acceptance in both the good and bad times. He egged Joseph, Stanley and me on through medical school and beyond.

Carl Levenstein passed his medical practice onto his sons, but his sense of decency, tolerance and integrity went to all of us who knew him. I wish to extend condolences to Phyllis, Joseph, Stanley, Jennifer and Rosalind and all his grandchildren.

Books

ABC of Clinical Genetics

By Helen M. Kingston. 2nd ed. Illustrated. Pp. 73. £15.00. London: BMJ. 1994. ISBN 0-7279-0846-4.

Clinical genetics has evolved into an important super-speciality which touches all branches of medicine. The amount of information which can be provided for affected persons and their families continues to increase, and the range of genetic services is constantly widening.

The 2nd edition of the ABC contains a comprehensive overview of the current state of clinical genetics. Facts and concepts are presented with great clarity and the text is commendably brief and to-the-point. Numerous colour photographs and diagrams attract the interest of the reader and greatly facilitate comprehension of this potentially difficult subject.

This book will be of real interest to all persons directly or indirectly involved with clinical genetics and its acquisition is strongly recommended. The author, Dr Helen Kingston, is to be congratulated on her efforts and it is to be hoped that updated editions will continue to appear in the future.

The standard of production is high and the price of £15 (R90) for this soft covered A4 sized 75-page book is very reasonable.

Peter Beighton

Pharmacology of the Contraceptive Steroids

By Joseph W. Goldzieher & Kenneth Fotherby. Pp. 479. \$125.00. New York: Raven Press. 1993. ISBN 0-7817-0097-3.

Hormonal contraceptives have been more widely studied and intensively researched than any other medicinal agent in

history, yet misinformation prevails and controversy continues. The authors' intention was to collect basic information from the vast literature in order to clarify present day knowledge and expedite future investigation.

The history of the Pill gives an interesting insight into the development of oral contraceptives (OCs). Detailed information provides an update on metabolism, mode of action and pharmacokinetics of oral and injectable oestrogens and progestogens in animals and humans. There is a clear description of the effects on the hypothalamic-pituitary-ovarian systems, breast, lactation and reproductive tracts, as well as adrenal and thyroid glands and liver. The issue about OCs and bone mass and strength is still unresolved, but OCs are recommended for women who in addition to requiring contraceptives are likely to have reduced bone mass. Clinical application is fairly limited, and includes short references to the effects of OCs on cerebral and cardiovascular disease, migraine, neurological neoplasms, seizure and mood disorders. The authors quote from the FDA that: 'The risk of thrombo-embolism with today's OCs is practically non-existent'. Epidemiological studies indicate that smoking is the most dangerous risk factor.

The immunological effects of OCs are insignificant, and the possibility of increase in chromosomal abnormalities from OC use is extremely remote. The subject of OCs and drug interaction is reviewed, describing the mechanistic basis of their interactions. The authors suggest that in future, improvement in compliance is likely to prove more important than improvement in chemistry, and that there are unlikely to be any significant changes in hormonal contraceptives in the foreseeable future.

This book will be of greater interest to those studying basic sciences than to family planning practitioners.

K. Esther Sapire

Drug Alert

Recommendations pertaining to the use of viral vaccines: influenza

Review of influenza activity — 1994

Witwatersrand area (National Institute for Virology). The influenza season of 1994 was characterized by moderate to severe influenza activity. The school absenteeism programme involving approximately 9 000 children at primary and high schools showed only one short peak in absenteeism during the second half of the season. A total of 43 isolates (23 influenza B and 20 influenza A H₃N₂) were made between 26 May and 22 September. The influenza B isolates were made during the first half of the season and were further characterized at the WHO Influenza Reference Centre, London, as B/Quingdao/102/92. The majority of the influenza A isolates were most closely related to A/Guangdong/25/93.