

Book Reviews/Boekbesprekings

Principles and practice of medicine

The Principles and Practice of Medicine. By William Osler. Pp. xvi + 1079. Illustrated. Reprinted in facsimile for the Classics of Medicine Library, Division of Gryphon Editions Ltd, Birmingham, Alabama. 1978.

When Osler produced the first modern textbook of medicine in 1892, many readers were to find that his personal charm was matched by the quality of his writing. Even today, you will pick up this facsimile edition of the most famous textbook at your peril. Start browsing and you are liable to be hooked for hours.

The most important sections are those in which Osler records his own observations of disease at the bedside and in the autopsy room. He had the insight to realize that most therapy in 1892 was based on mythology, and the sections on treatment reflect this.

Where aetiology is a matter of speculation he records the opinions of others, but quite often comes down on what has since proved to be the right side. He was clearly intrigued, for example, with the view that diabetes mellitus was a disease of the pancreas, although this was by no means a commonly accepted view. He was enthusiastic about subcutaneous infusion of saline for cholera and rightly says: 'This is really a valuable method, thoroughly physiological, and should be tried in all severe cases.'

Time and again he predicted correctly that some infectious disease or other would be found to be due to a micro-organism. Occasionally, of course, he was completely baffled, as in the case of malaria; Laveran had isolated the protozoon but its transmission remained a mystery.

Some modern ideas appear; coronary spasm and coronary thrombosis are mentioned, but the association with angina remains obscure, and the latter is classified under 'neuroses of the heart'.

Reading this book gives us a new respect for the clinical acumen of the giants of the past — without our technology, Osler and his peers came a long way.

External fixation of fractures

Current Concepts of External Fixation of Fractures. Ed. by H. K. Uthoff. Pp. x + 442. Illustrated. DM 138,-. Berlin: Springer-Verlag. 1982.

Dr Uthoff has again organized an applied basic sciences symposium — on this occasion on external fixation of fractures. This book records the proceedings of this symposium, held in Ottawa in May 1981. The information is welcomed because, with the plethora of different external fixation devices on the market, surgeons and trainees are apt to become bewildered and confused. The collation of all this material in one compact volume is to be commended. In addition to a comparative account of the various systems available, papers on the extension of the use of external fixation, for example in pelvic fractures, are included. The final chapter on a possible new substitute for bone grafts is of interest.

This book should be read by all practitioners who are (or are likely to be) involved in the treatment of musculoskeletal trauma.

G. Dall

Rheumatology in general practice

Rheumatology in General Practice. By M. Rogers and N. Williams. Pp. 266. Illustrated. R19,30. London: Churchill Livingstone. 1981.

Rheumatology is one of the specialties about which every general practitioner should know a fair amount. The vast majority of people

with rheumatic disorders will be treated in general practice, and the specialist rheumatologist will only be consulted rarely. Rogers and Williams, one of them a general practitioner with a hospital appointment in rheumatology and the other a consultant in rheumatology and rehabilitation in an English hospital, have collaborated to produce a valuable book for general practitioners anywhere. Before considering rheumatic disorders regionally they lead off with a short chapter on epidemiology, followed by sections on symptoms, management, and investigation. They then discuss rheumatic disorders in general and proceed to go into detail about disorders of the neck, upper limbs, lower limbs, and lower back. The book closes with 2 chapters on rheumatic disorders in children and disability in general. This last chapter can be largely disregarded by South African readers since it deals with the British scene, but all of the other chapters can be read with profit. An appendix to the book gives a series of multiple-choice questions and modified essay questions to test the general practitioner's knowledge after reading the book.

This is one of the Library of General Practice Series by Churchill Livingstone, and like the others it is very suitable for its purpose.

Diagnosis and treatment of cancer

Evaluation of Methods of Treatment and Diagnostic Procedures in Cancer: Studies Conducted by the Project on Controlled Therapeutic Trials (1978-1982) (UICC Technical Report Series, vol. 70). Ed. by R. Flamant and C. Fohanno. Pp. 146. Illustrated. Sw.fr. 24,-. Geneva: UICC. 1982.

This slim monograph is volume 70 in the UICC Technical Report Series, and contains reports of studies conducted by the Project on Controlled Therapeutic Trials during 1978 - 1982. This UICC project was set up in 1966 to study and review methods of controlled therapeutic trials. Initially the group published lists of ongoing trials, but with the advent of the International Cancer Research Data Bank of the NCI it was decided to discontinue the publication of the UICC lists. The project now focuses on the difficulties met in the conduct of controlled therapeutic trials, and this volume is a technical report giving results of studies conducted. The aim is not only to study methodology, but also to investigate procedures for rendering controlled trials easier to conduct and likely to yield more valid conclusions.

Chapters of practical interest include an international survey on randomization procedures, statistical aspects of trial size, special problems in the evaluation of results in adjuvant trials, evaluation of diagnostic procedures, and special problems relating to ethics and informed consent. While this booklet contains useful information for clinical research workers, it is doubtful if doctors not intimately familiar with controlled clinical trials will find it of any interest.

H. C. Falkson

Psychopathology

The AMDP-System: Manual for the Assessment and Documentation of Psychopathology. Ed. by W. Guy and T. A. Ban. Pp. xii + 121. Illustrated. DM 16,80. Berlin: Springer-Verlag. 1982.

AMDP stands for Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Methodik und Dokumentation in der Psychiatrie or, in English, the Association for Methodology and Documentation in Psychiatry. The system was founded in 1965 by a group of psychiatrists from German-speaking areas to develop a uniform system for documentation of information on psychiatric patients. The components of the system have now been translated into English and the result will primarily be of interest to psychiatrists, particularly those dealing with studies involving data processing.

Pharmacological principles of cancer treatment

Pharmacologic Principles of Cancer Treatment. Ed. by B. Chabner. Pp. xii + 457. Illustrated. R83,95. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders. 1982.

This is a timely book which deals with an important subject. Despite the rapid development and successful use of drugs for treating cancer in the past 3 decades, there are hardly any textbooks on the pharmacology of anti-cancer drugs, so that this book fills a definite need. The interdependence between medical oncology and anti-neoplastic pharmacology is evident in every phase of cancer treatment. This book provides a comprehensive and detailed examination of preclinical and clinical pharmacology of anti-cancer drugs.

Twenty-three knowledgeable contributors, under the imaginative editorship of Bruce Chabner, have collaborated to present a final product that should serve to enlighten all those involved with the treatment of cancer. The book is divided into 2 sections. The introductory chapters give background to the general principles of drug action and usage. Topics such as drug transport, cellular pharmacology, cell kinetics, pharmacokinetics and the principles of drug level monitoring are dealt with. In the 2nd section the authors discuss specific classes of clinically effective anti-neoplastic agents. Compounds of unproven value only receive cursory attention and only to the extent that their effects have relevance to the use of active drugs.

The co-authors are to be commended on this book, especially in view of the explosive pace of research in the cancer drug field. This book should prove valuable to clinicians as well as pharmacologists; it provides information about recent progress in medical oncology and should also serve as a signpost to future research.

H. C. Falkson

Rheumatic diseases — applied drug therapy

Applied Drug Therapy of the Rheumatic Diseases. By H. A. Bird and V. Wright. Pp. xiii + 309. Illustrated. £15,-. London: Wright PSG. 1982.

Drug therapy for rheumatic disorders has now become a fairly complicated process, and it is by no means certain that the available drugs are used to the best advantage. This book is not written as a simple guide to drug therapy but ranges much further afield than that and is obviously designed for the specialist or the trainee specialist rather than the generalist, who would only wish to refer to it occasionally. The book considers all the patterns of rheumatic disease and their variations in relation to drug response, and then looks at the animal models of these diseases and the application of animal models to the study of drugs. A 3rd chapter concerns assessment in rheumatic diseases as a guide to drug responses, after which the various types of drug such as the analgesics are discussed in turn. There is a chapter on polypharmacy with discussions on unwanted interactions, desirable interactions and patient compliance. There is a special section on osteo-arthritis in all its facets, and another on the localization of drug response. Drugs in surgery of rheumatic disorders are also considered, as are the unconventional treatments and novelties (such as vitamins and diet), after which the book closes with chapters on clinical trials of drugs and the marketing of drugs. Although the authors make no claim to comprehensive treatment of the subject, this is a very detailed review of all aspects of therapy, backed up by hundreds of references, and will certainly appeal to the thoughtful clinician who has to deal with these disorders or concern himself with the application of clinical pharmacology to them.

Diseases of the thyroid gland

Thyroid Disease: The Facts. By R. I. S. Bayliss. Pp. vii + 113. Illustrated. R18,30. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1982.

This excellent little book by a renowned British endocrinologist and thyroidologist has been written for people with thyroid disorders, in the hope that they may learn something about their disease and, as a result, co-operate with treatment which is sometimes prolonged. The author succeeds in making a somewhat difficult subject easy to understand and the book covers topics ranging from understanding the work of the thyroid gland, its manufacture of hormones, and its control, to diseases of the thyroid gland which are relatively common, particularly thyrotoxicosis, hypothyroidism, goitre and thyroid carcinoma.

Although written in the simplest of terms and language, in parts it is fairly detailed and I would suspect that many patients would have trouble digesting it; none the less I am sure the intelligent patient will glean a lot of information about his particular thyroid disorder. In addition, it should prove a useful reference volume for the medical student or general practitioner.

It is highly recommended for undergraduate and postgraduate students who would like to know a bit more about thyroid disease without getting involved too much in details.

J. Miller

Nuclear power

Nuclear Power: Health Implications of Transuranium Elements (WHO Regional Publications European Series, No. 11). By WHO. Pp. vii + 88. Illustrated. WHO: Geneva. 1982.

A major international debate on alternative forms of energy production is in progress and will continue. Two of its most important and often conflicting aspects are cost on the one hand and health, safety and environmental considerations on the other, and there is no low-cost solution to the problems created by high technology.

This report by the WHO group provides general guidelines for national public health and environmental authorities. It considers three major facets: physiological, toxicological and dosimetric aspects of the transuranium elements (those which occur above uranium in the periodic table). The report concludes that the radiation doses can be evaluated and the risk of effects on health estimated with sufficient accuracy for the purpose of radiation protection. It recommends further research into the possible combined effects of irradiation and effective containment of the material.

For major installations such as fuel fabrication plants and nuclear power reactors, the public authorities involved in the event of off-site emergencies should be informed in advance of any procedure they may be advised to follow, which includes complete close co-ordination between local management and those agencies involved with fuel and power. The transuranium elements enter the body via the routes of inhalation, wound contamination, skin abrasions or burns, and ingestion.

Besides causing direct tissue damage, the development of cancer is considered to be the most serious consequence of transuranium element deposition in the body, and reduction of lifespan is due to the late effects of both.

Following release, radioactive material disperses in the atmosphere or into the water; in this way it enters and creates an environmental danger to man, animals and plants.

The 11th report of the relevant WHO working group concludes that the main protective measures are concerned with the correct environmental siting of nuclear facilities and the transport and the effective containment of radioactive materials.

L. C. van Oudenhoove de St Géry