Book reviews

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Teratogen Update: Environmentally Induced Birth Defect Risks

Edited by John L Sever and Robert L Brent. (Pp 248.) New York: Alan R Liss. 1986.

This book is an updated collection of articles originally published in the journal *Teratology*. The articles are all reviews written by people with special interest and experience in the fields covered and are grouped according to the type of teratogen.

The largest section concerns teratogenic drugs. There is an excellent clinical review of thalidomide embryopathy, including features which distinguish the condition from other limb reduction syndromes. This is most helpful to those of us now called upon to counsel subjects with malformations who were born during the period when thalidomide was prescribed. Another excellent article summarises animal and human defects associated with vitamin A congeners. The reviews on alcohol, DES, warfarin, hydantoin, and several other drugs as teratogens are brief but well referenced. In this section a summary of published work on Bendectin (debendox) is included; it concludes that no studies have shown a convincing link with birth defects.

In the section dealing with teratogenic effects of congenital infections the only paper of any length is that on congenital rubella syndrome, but the other shorter articles on the whole do contain useful summaries and reference sections.

Toxic exposure of populations, including pregnant women, to chemical teratogens should not happen, but the poisoning of the population of two Japanese cities by mercury discharged into local waterways, and the contamination of cooking oil with polychlorinated biphenyls, will sadly not be the only examples of mass poisoning. These reports illustrate the inevitable delay in linking the teratogen with the birth defects, and the difficulty in obtaining accurate data.

The fourth group of articles concern physical, nutritional, and other factors. Included are smoking, atomic irradiation, therapeutic and diagnostic radiation, and malformations in the infants of diabetic mothers. I am also pleased to see a review on hyperthermia as a teratogen; this agent is rarely considered and I feel warrants further animal research and clinical observation, ideally in the latter case as a prospective study.

The volume ends with five articles by one of the co-editors dealing largely with medicolegal aspects.

This, on the whole, is a very useful book, although, because of the many authors, the style varies as does the amount of detail about the subject which the authors include. The book is interesting to read and well indexed and laid out. Some but not all of the articles are well illustrated.

The book should be included in the libraries of departments of obstetrics, genetics, and paediatrics and indeed would usefully be included in the library of postgraduate medical centres for consultation by anyone involved in the care of pregnant women or in the investigation of their offspring.

DIAN DONNAI

Perinatal Genetics: Diagnosis and Treatment

Edited by Ian H Porter, Norma H Hatcher, and Ann M Willey. (Pp 308; £37.50.) New York: Academic Press. 1986.

This book is one of a series of volumes stemming from the annual birth defects symposia held by the New York State Health Department; specifically the 15th annual meeting in 1984, with the proceedings published two years later. Unfortunately, many of the chapters deal with rapidly evolving areas of genetics, and only a few of the chapters have had their references updated since the symposium.

The growing and exciting field of perinatal genetics is of interest to perinatologists, neonatologists, geneticists, and many primary care physicians. This multi-authored endeavour, with six sections containing 17 chapters in all, has something for everyone. The first section provides several excellent critical reviews of the available information on the known genetic contribution to early pregnancy loss and spontaneous abortion, and should prove useful to both primary care providers and geneticists. The next section contains three papers on prenatal diagnosis with a very clearly written chapter on classical phenylketonuria, including discussion of the use of restriction fragment length polymorphisms and linkage analysis in the prenatal diagnosis of the disorder, which should be easily followed by most non-geneticists. The chapter on the prenatal diagnosis of the fragile X syndrome presents the author's own experience and is clearly outdated and methodologically flawed. This section also contains an optimistic overview of chorionic villus sampling.

The section on prenatal treatment deals with both