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BOOK REVIEWS

Mendelian Inheritance in Man. 9th edition. V A McKusick. (£69.00.) Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1990.

It is two years since the last edition of this constantly used classic appeared and while tables in the introduction show us the growth in human genes mapped and identified, the weight of the present volume, with 400 extra pages, is even more tangible evidence. The year 1990 represents a landmark for MIM since its on line counterpart OMIM has now been integrated with the new Genome Database (GDB), allowing both clinical and gene mapping data to be accessed together. Meanwhile, this hard copy edition contains an abundance of summary tables and chromosome maps relating disease data to gene location and function.

MIM continues to be remarkably successful in trapping new information, a tribute both to the stamina of Dr McKusick and the skills of his helpers; there are two new ones who appear by name for the first time. However, this steady accretion of new material means that the sheer volume of text on some loci is becoming rather indigestible. An important task for the next edition would be a vigorous pruning of outdated material. This will be more difficult than adding new data, but if done critically and systematically should add greatly to the use of the book. It might even result in the next edition shrinking in size! Meanwhile, regardless of the computerised on line version, MIM itself remains an essential companion for everyone in medical genetics; we can only wish Dr McKusick continuing health and energy so that we can look forward to a 10th edition in 1992.

PETER S HARPER

The Genetics of Mood Disorders. Ming T Tsuang, Stephen V Faraone. (Pp 220; £29.00.) Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1990.

Psychiatric genetics is becoming increasingly popular. The importance of

genetic factors in the aetiology of many psychiatric disorders has been known for some time. Recent interest has to a large extent been motivated by the enticing possibility of being able to apply modern molecular genetic techniques to the study of mental illness. This book reflects these trends by reviewing the state of current knowledge concerning the genetics of effective disorder, one of the most common forms of psychiatric illness.

It starts with a long chapter discussing diagnostic and methodological issues. Recent years have seen the development of a fairly sophisticated research methodology aimed at the reliable diagnosis and the collection of psychiatric data in a systematic fashion. These methods are described in some detail and anybody contemplating entering this field for the first time will learn much from this chapter, though they may decide to avoid psychiatric genetics altogether when they realise "the wide range of phenomenologic variabilities among disorders that share disturbance of mood as a primary component of the clinical picture". As the authors acknowledge, both aetiological heterogeneity and pleiotropy probably play a role in producing such a complex picture of overlapping clinical syndromes.

There then follow chapters on each of the traditional methods of psychiatric genetic research; family studies, twin studies, and adoption studies. Research in each of these modalities supports a significant role for genetic factors in the aetiology of mood disorders. This seems to be greater for bipolar disorder (where the patient experiences both manic and depressive episodes) than for unipolar disorder (where the patient experiences only depressive episodes), though the genetic relationship between unipolar and bipolar disorders is still poorly understood. It also seems clear that minor mood disorders and depressive personality characteristics have less of a genetic component than do the major mood disorders.

This is followed by a chapter on quantitative models of genetic transmission. Mathematical modelling studies do not consistently support a specific mode of genetic transmission. Such studies are, however, bedevilled by problems and the authors conclude: "If mood disorders are genetically heterogeneous then the results of modelling studies are meaningless".