BOOK REVIEWS

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Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. 2nd edition. Alan E H Emery. (Pp 389; £45.00.) Oxford: Oxford Medical Publications. 1994.

Professor Emery's book is a useful reference text for all of those involved in the care of patients with Duchenne muscular dystrophy or research into the muscular dystrophies. Very often a particular health care professional will come into contact with only one aspect of the condition. This text provides a rounded view of all of the many issues involved.

The description of the clinical features of the disease in Professor Emery's personal series of patients is vivid and the consideration of the techniques of investigation comprehensive, although as Professor Emery acknowledges, many of these techniques have now been largely superseded by DNA and dystrophin analyses. These new aspects of the diagnosis are also considered in depth in a significant expansion of the previous edition and some aspects of what is now known about the molecular pathology of the condition are also described. A summary of the continued debate over pathogenesis is presented, although the book does not attempt to cover these still unclear issues in any detail. Inevitably, therefore, a much more complete exposition of these areas may be found in recent reviews.

The section describing prevention of Duchenne muscular dystrophy is a clear exposition of the principles involved, and the process of carrier identification is particularly carefully laid out and follows a logical course from the older methods of determining carrier status to the newer DNA and dystrophin based tests. The increased specificity gained by these new advances, but also their limitations, are clearly illustrated. The chapter on genetic counselling sets out the issues beyond carrier testing which are inherent in the process of counselling: issues which are well known to the genetic community, but which are often less clear to other professionals who may be involved in the care of Duchenne boys and their families. The principles of the management of the condition are discussed and there is brief mention of the prospects of treatment by myoblast transfer and gene therapy.

This revision of Professor Emery's book has lost none of the detailed historical perspective presented in the first edition, while an overview of the vast explosion of knowledge about the molecular biology of Duchenne muscular dystrophy has been added. The book therefore is a useful starting point for those who care for Duchenne muscular dystrophy patients and their families who want to improve their knowledge about all aspects of the condition from a very clear and readable text.

KATHERINE BUSHBY

Genetics of Colorectal Cancer for Clinical Practice. Fred H Menko. (Pp 187; £107.00.) The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishing. 1993.

For those with a keen interest in the genetics of colorectal cancer, be they geneticists with an increasing burden of patients with a family history of cancer or gastroenterologists or surgeons who are keen on screening, this is a fairly comprehensive review of the genetics of the condition. The book is divided into six chapters of which the first and fifth are aimed at a relatively low level. The first chapter deals with genetic predisposition and should be

more than straightforward for anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of genetics. The fifth chapter deals with clinical examples and while this is useful to illustrate the types of predisposition, particularly in the hereditary non-polyposis colorectal cancer families, these are open to different interpretations. For instance, the author draws a conclusion that a pedigree containing seven affected people with cancer, but only one with endometrial cancer, seems to indicate a low risk of endometrial cancer in first degree relatives. However, six out of the seven cases are male and one would presume that they were unlikely to develop this disease.

There are good reviews of the general aspects of colorectal cancer and of familial and hereditary colorectal cancer and these are well researched and referenced. The fourth chapter deals with the mechanisms of colorectal carcinogenesis which does not become embroiled in complex cell biopsy. The final chapter gives guidelines for clinical practice for the various conditions predisposing to colorectal cancer both for affected subjects and their offspring.

The text is well written in good English and is appropriately divided into subheadings. I personally became tired of the introductions stating what was going to be said in each section of the chapter and this was often repeated at the beginning of each section.

Any book which is written on genetics is likely to be out of date as soon as it is published and the author has gone to very great lengths to include research right up to the publishing deadline. However, he is very unlucky in the fact that several major developments have happened even in the six months leading up to this review. Therefore, there is no mention of linkage to chromosome 3 for the HNPCC families or of the cloning of the chromosome 2 gene. Finally the new work showing the genotype/phenotype relationship in familial adenomatous polyposis has also been missed for this very reason.

I would certainly be happy to recommend this book particularly to someone just entering this field of interest or for a non-geneticist who has a special interest in colorectal cancer. However, the book is rather expensive for what amounts to a rather slim volume.

GARETH EVANS