

I can strongly recommend the book to haematologists and their colleagues in the laboratory. Its proper home is on the laboratory bench and not the library shelf.

MARCUS PEMBREY

Dermatoglyphics. An International Bibliography
By Jamshed Mavalwala. (Pp. xii + 306. £19.00.)
The Hague: Mouton. 1977.

This book consists of a bibliography of papers on dermatoglyphic studies in the fields of medicine and anthropology. The references date from early studies done at the end of the 19th century to the end of 1973. The bibliography is arranged alphabetically according to the first author's surname. The usefulness of the book lies in the subject index at the end. With this one can look up papers on individual subjects such as 'Klinefelter's Syndrome' or 'Honshu Island'. Workers in the field of dermatoglyphs will find this a most helpful book. Though it appears to be expensive for what is after all just a list of references, in terms of the time and money it could save a research worker it is good value. By about 1980 a second volume would be very useful.

T. J. DAVID

The Genetic Approach to Human Disease
By V. M. Riccardi. (Pp. iii + 273; 13 Figures + 16 Tables.) New York: Oxford University Press. 1977.

This book is an interesting attempt by an American clinical geneticist to set out for colleagues in other branches of medicine the newer contributions of genetics to medical practice. On the whole, it is likely to meet this need. Topics covered are the usual ones, including chromosome disorders, Mendelian disorders, polygenic disorders, and inborn errors of metabolism. There is also a chapter on teratogenic agents, one on prenatal diagnosis, no less than four on genetic counselling, one on ethical, moral, and legal aspects, and a final chapter on the organisation of genetic services and education in the Colorado-Wyoming region.

The introductory chapters are of good standard, though the author perhaps goes too far to avoid mathematical concepts. For example, it is needlessly unsophisticated to describe the interpretation of CK levels in the determination of the carrier state for Duchenne muscular dystrophy in terms of false positives and negatives, rather than the relative likelihood of the counsellee's level belonging to the normal or the carrier distribution. Again, the statement that the risk of mental retardation to the offspring of two parents who are both moderately retarded as a result of normal polygenic variation is virtually 100% is true for the mean of groups of such offspring, but certainly not for the individual children. And again, in the section on the genetic and teratogenic effects of radiation, the primary care doctors and the obstetrician surely need some guidance on the level of radiation at which they and the patient should seek an expert opinion.

The chapters on genetic counselling are comprehensive if somewhat long-winded. One striking feature is that the author visualises the clinical geneticist arranging tests which his counterpart in Britain would expect to have been done before the family was referred to him. Another striking feature is the amount of time the genetic counsellor (and it is envisaged that this is usually a team and not an individual) spends on each family. This is estimated to average about 7 hours, including 3 hours in direct discussion with the family. This is a luxury service indeed, both in terms of cost and the time of trained personnel, who are at present in short supply.

The chapter on ethical, moral, and legal issues is interesting and comprehensive and illustrates the greater need to spell out these issues in detail in a country with such a heterogeneous population as the United States. On the difficult problem of the counsellee's right to deny access to other members of the family at risk, the author takes the view that the relatives' right to information probably has priority over the consultant's right to privacy, but notes that the situation in law is still not clear. On the question of professional responsibility, the author favours a greater allocation of such responsibility to non-medically qualified staff than medical opinion in England would think wise and than the law would permit.

C. O. CARTER