Book reviews

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Genetic Disease: Screening and Management

Edited by T P Carter and A M Willey. (Pp 426; £32.00.) New York: Alan R Liss. 1986.

This multi-author text is based on the XVIth Birth Defects Symposium held in 1985 and as stated in the preface its purpose is to "help fill the information gap by focussing on many relevant and yet-unanswered questions about genetic disease screening and management". To this end the book has chapters contributed by participants from the symposium outlining their personal experience and discussing various aspects of newborn screening for cystic fibrosis, sickle cell disease and other haemoglobin variants, metabolic disorders, hypothyroidism, and congenital adrenal hyperplasia as well as screening in pregnancy to identify haemoglobinopathy carriers. Particularly useful chapters are those by N Holtzman concerning the criteria and evaluation of screening programmes and that by H Levy reviewing the experience and management of maternal PKU.

One criticism of some chapters of the book is that they appear to be direct transcripts of talks as given at the symposium with little alteration when put into the written form, resulting in a feeling that some of the experience is anecdotal rather than distilled. The typeface used for the text and figures reinforces this feeling.

This book will obviously be of more interest to biochemical geneticists and to this end a number of the chapters go into considerable detail comparing different assay procedures with respect to their relative sensitivity. From the perspective of a clinical geneticist this is a book to peruse selected chapters of interest rather than to read from cover to cover.

R F MUELLER

Monoclonals and DNA Probes in Diagnostic and Preventive Medicine

Edited by R C Gallo, G Della Porta, and A Albertini. (Pp 256; \$45.50.) New York: Raven Press. 1987.

The publication of meeting proceedings with enticing titles such as *Monoclonals and DNA Probes in Diagnostic and Preventive Medicine* is an underhand attempt to help finance the meeting (BIOTECH RIA 86), which becomes a tax on libraries. This slim volume contains 24 very wide ranging contributions, most, but not all, of which discuss the use of DNA

probes or monoclonal antibodies or both, although not necessarily in an overtly clinical context. In that sense, several chapters might be considered challenging to the reader who is prepared to sit and think about how the principles of the work described might be used in preventive and diagnostic medicine. The too familiar format of introduction, materials and methods, results, and discussion, to which most of the authors cling, is not conducive to imparting ideas and principles clearly. One of the few daring departures from the usual formula is a paper, appropriately from the Paris Pasteur Institute, on molecular genetic approaches to the problems of vaccine production. With enviable clarity, it presents in uncluttered terms the new possibilities being explored. Technical details are accessible from the two dozen references cited.

Several other contributions do make important, oft forgotten points. 'Molecular Approach to Diagnostic and Preventive Medicine: the Status of the Art' is the unexpectedly stilted title to the enjoyable opening paper by Siniscalco and colleagues who discuss clearly the utilisation of linkage in genetic analysis in families and populations, the problems of recombination and of genetic heterogeneity, and the advantages of looking at these problems at the ultimate DNA level. In several other cases (for example, use of oligonucleotide probes for detection of haemoglobinopathies) nice illustrations are given without a clear statement of the principle. A more general approach would also be beneficial in fast moving fields such as muscular dystrophy where, inevitably, new data have superseded those presented here.

On the monoclonal antibody front, it is difficult to patch together a coherent picture of the many currently feasible and potential uses for this prolific technology. Too much detail of experimental data obscures the exciting prospects that can be envisaged for anti-idiotypic antibodies. A couple of simple diagrams might help. Only Colnaghi *et al* address systematically the problems and possible solutions of tumour therapy with antibodies. The now mundane but numerically most frequent use of monoclonals in routine immunoassay is barely touched upon.

It is difficult to discern the type of audience to whom a book like this is aimed. I think that the majority of the papers leaves the general principles beyond the reach of well informed 'outsiders' such as clinicians. The cognoscenti might appreciate