Book reviews

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The Developing Human. Clinically Oriented Embryology

4th edition. By Keith L Moore. (Pp 462; £18.95.) London: Saunders. 1988.

I had recently been looking through the medical school library for a textbook to refresh my ailing memory on some basic points in human embryology and had selected the previous edition of this book as one of the better texts, so I welcomed the opportunity to review this new edition.

The inclusion in the introductory chapter of definitions of a wide variety of basic medical terms along with a summary in the second chapter of gametogenesis and the female reproductive cycle makes the text suitable for preclinical medical students and undergraduate students in other disciplines, as well as clinical medical students.

Four chapters are given to a general chronological review of the development of the embryo and fetus as a whole. The majority of the remaining chapters review development of specific systems or parts of the body in detail. There is a separate chapter on the placenta and fetal membranes along with one of clinical relevance on congenital malformations with examples of chromosomal, single gene, multifactorial, and teratogenic causes. Each chapter includes a summary of the main points along with four or five clinically oriented questions, answers for which are at the end of the book. There is a large number of photographs and illustrations greatly facilitating visualising the developmental processes discussed in the text, the majority of the latter being in colour.

My one criticism of the book is the widespread use of italics in the text to indicate not only terms as they arise but what are deemed important concepts or points. This is presumably intended as an aid for revision but is, at first, slightly disconcerting. I would not, however, let this minor criticism detract from what is overall an excellent undergraduate/clinical medical student textbook of embryology.

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Medical Genetics Handbook

By Harold Chen. (Pp 384; £51.25.) St Louis, Missouri: Warren H Green Inc. 1988.

The preface describes this book as a convenient, readily accessible source of basic and applied

information in the field of medical genetics and recommends it to clinicians, geneticists, genetic counsellors, medical students, and other health professionals. The first 200 of 384 pages comprises four introductory sections covering a wide range of topics from inheritance mechanisms through chromosome structure and banding techniques, linkage and lod score calculation, to molecular and population genetics. The latter section is notable for using clearly worked examples to make the algebra easier to digest. The final and largest section is entitled 'Selected topics' and covers, with many examples, birth defects, syndromes and dysmorphogenetic concepts (viz the developmental field), dermatoglyphics, prenatal diagnosis, IVF, newborn screening, skeletal dysplasias, and, interestingly, treatment of genetic diseases. The text is well referenced but it is disappointing that none is more recent than 1986 when the book, written on a Macintosh microcomputer, was completed. A two year gap between desktop and shop seems excessive. Moreover, many of the computer generated diagrams have been reduced in size to the extent that important figures, such as 5.7-1 and 5.7-2 which explain autoradiograph patterns after Southern blotting, are spoiled by tiny, unreadable script.

There is undoubtedly a lot of information packed into the book, which is written with many tables and subheadings in a terse and didactic style close to that of lecture notes. Inevitably compression leads to occasional errors and reviewers carping about quirky emphasis. For example, Professor Edwards is truncated to the man behind Edwards' syndrome, holoprosencephaly does not go with hypertelorism (p 219), X linked aqueduct stenosis is not the most common aetiology of congenital hydrocephalus (p 234); there is no general discussion of genetic counselling yet three pages are devoted to a description of the "fetal anatomic sex assignment scan".

I suppose one cannot expect grey areas to be highlighted and the author's personal opinions to be aired in a handbook, but this would have made it more appealing to readers who are already working in the field. The book's breadth and economical style make it admirably suited for revision for an examination. Thus, your departmental library should carry a copy but at a price of over £50 one hesitates to recommend the purchase of a personal copy.

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