This edition also shows how much wider the impact of molecular approaches has become, while haemoglobin disorders are still used prominently as examples, the advantages in numerous mendelian and non-mendelian disorders are well covered and illustrate the convergence between medical genetics and the various specialties using molecular techniques. The potential and actual ethical problems are covered with both sensitivity and common sense; the applications to our understanding of cancers and the possibilities of gene therapy are fully explored.

Much of the original influence of the book was because the author was not only a scientist but a practising clinician, enabling him to act in a remarkable way as a bridge, not only for molecular concepts and techniques to become applied to clinical problems, but also for other clinicians to cross and to see for themselves the extraordinary possibilities for their own fields of work. The need for a bridge of this kind remains very great, one senses the author's frustration at what the past decade has not achieved, as well as what it has. In particular, the need for society as a whole to be scientifically and genetically literate has become imperative if the 'New Genetics', having firmly become part of clinical practice, is to be fully accepted by society for the ways in which it influences patients and families with many important and common disorders.

PETER S HARPER


Those familiar with the Dysmorphology database built up by the same authors will understand both the aims and workings of the Neurogenetics database, which was compiled in order that clinicians involved with neurological disorders and syndromes would have ready access to reports of similar patients in medical publications. The authors also intended that the Neurogenetics database would be comprehensive and quick to use. These aims have been admirably achieved.

The Database is amazingly easy to install and it is easy to use AS LONG AS YOU READ THE MANUAL FIRST. This is small, compact, and clear. Some uses of keys are unexpected, and some have different uses at different levels, so a little study beforehand is essential. The manual explains the different ways in which you can search for syndromes, or search for references if you so wish, or add in your own patient data. This latter feature is very useful for those of us who frequently see undiagnosable patients.

The Database is concerned with syndromes rather than common conditions, and complicated varieties of, for example, spinal muscular atrophy or spastic paraplegia are easier to find than the more common uncomplicated forms. Nearly 2000 syndromes with 8000 references are included, and many of these belong to just single patients. It is remarkably comprehensive to include such isolated cases, and saves the user much time and effort in searching through published reports. However, such conditions may in fact never be seen again in another patient.

Firstly, the user has to learn how to select a few conditions out of the 2000, and the art here is of choosing relatively uncommon features to lead into the syndrome search. Classified features are listed in the lucid and brief manual that accompanies the Database. For example, it is more useful to choose 'cystic changes' than 'cystic', although choosing both features on separate lines (which means add) is just as good. There are 229 syndromes which manifest dementia, and 100 with 'sparse hair'. Having found syndromes that you wish to learn about, you can ask for clinical features, abstract, and references. The abstracts (which are dated) are the high spots of the Database. They are composed by the authors and express their opinions as to the significance of the syndromes, how they relate to other conditions, and generally are wise and experienced assessments. For those disorders in which DNA techniques help carrier detection or prenatal diagnosis, the latest information is provided. If you wish to keep a record of these valuable comments and the appropriate references, you just have to request 'Print'; it does not matter what printer you have so long as it is connected to your computer.

The authors should be congratulated on what must surely be a very altruistic service, namely reading and assessing the body of neurological publications on behalf of the rest of us, and I do not envy them their "regular review of over 1000 journals". I am sure that many others, like me, will find it most rewarding to search through the Database for an unusual combination of signs, will thereby learn about many disorders other than the one being searched for, and will, in passing, be familiarised with neurological publications. At the same time it is reassuring to know that the features of an undiagnosed patient are not already listed as a reported syndrome.

How often the Database is used will depend upon how often patients with rare syndromes are seen. Therefore, clinicians who deal with neurological syndromes will find the Database more useful than those who predominantly deal with common disorders, which is why paediatricians will find it more valuable than adult neurologists. Clinical geneticists will find it a helpful adjunct to the Dysmorphology database. One Database for each centre should be sufficient, particularly in view of the expense (£150) of the yearly updates.

SARAH BUNDEY

NOTICES

Ehlers–Danlos Support Group

The Ehlers–Danlos Support Group has produced an information booklet on Ehlers–Danlos syndrome. This has 20 pages and 15 sections covering various aspects of the syndrome. The authors of the booklet are Professor P Beighton, Professor A C Bird, Professor R Grahame, Mr A P Barabas, Dr H A Bird, Dr F M Pope, and Mr I P Hunter. The first copy of the booklet is free with subsequent copies costing £1.00 plus postage. They can be obtained from The Ehlers–Danlos Support Group (Mrs V A Burrows), 2 High Garth, Richmond, North Yorkshire DL10 4DG. Tel 0344 57695.

European School of Medical Genetics

The Fifth Course of the European School of Medical Genetics will be held on 5 to 12 December 1992 in Sestri Levante (Genoa), Italy. Directors: Victor A McKusick, Baltimore, and Giovanni Romeo, Genoa. Enquiries to: Istituto G Gaslini, Laboratorio di Genetics, L.go Gerolamo Gaslini, 5, 16148 Genova-Quarto, Italy. Tel: (010) 5636-370/400.