The papers in this volume do vary in quality but there is enough meat to provide several meals of thought for anyone involved in the practice or investigation of genetic counselling.

L KERZIN-STORRAR


This book sets out to provide "a comprehensive description of our present state of knowledge of the cellular, molecular, and physiologic processes underlying atherosclerosis". It is a multi-author book with 19 chapters divided into four sections describing the cellular events of atherosclerosis, lipoprotein metabolism, other risk factors, and a final section entitled, rather strangely, 'genetics'. The main difficulty for the editors of a book like this is to avoid the tendency of authors who are aiming to attract, what level of previous knowledge to assume, and, particularly for a complex multifactorial disorder such as coronary artery disease, how to present the various levels of complexity found in the discipline. Regarding this book, it is not clear whether it is aimed at the cardiologist/clinician who is interested in applying molecular genetic techniques, or at the molecular biologist who is thinking of tackling a new disorder. The other main problem of this book is that most of the chapters appear to have been written during 1990, and therefore are already almost two years out of date. In such a fast moving field, this is a serious problem, and certainly detracts from its value for anyone already involved in the field.

The different chapters do cover many of the basic aspects of what is known about coronary artery disease, with a total of more than 2000 references in the book as a whole. However, many chapters do not shed light on the molecular genetics of the disorder, nor is there a serious attempt to pull together the different aspects of the genetic, biochemical, cellular, and physical processes that interact to cause the disease. The reader is therefore presented with a number of different snapshots of the problem, and left to his own devices to try to integrate them into the complete picture. In this the reader is not helped by the subject index which is poorly cross referenced between chapters.

Since the principal authors of the book are from Los Angeles, it is not completely surprising that the vast majority of the chapters are written by authors from the west coast of the USA or Canada, with only one European contributor and one from Australia. This undoubtedly gives a bias to the views presented, and in particular to the selection of references, and to the relative importance of the aspects covered. The chapter describing the cellular events is good and presents a useful overview with a number of helpful illustrations. The cellular interactions in atherosclerosis are very complex, and are not presented in a way that is easy to understand. The section on modified lipoproteins is comprehensive, but does not reference a number of European contributions to the field, while the sections on viral genes and mechanical factors are well referenced and very clear. In contrast, the sections on lipoprotein metabolism are both sketchy and repetitious; the part on high density lipoproteins would have benefited from the inclusion of figures or tables, and hypertriglyceridaemia is poorly covered. This chapter on Lp(a) is clear, but gives no new insight into the mechanism of action of this intriguing lipoprotein, and I feel that for most of these sections these and other authors have presented more useful overviews in the last year or so. In contrast the section on bile acid synthesis and enterohepatic circulation is excellent and clearly written. In the section on risk factors there are chapters on hypertension, and the possible role of immunological processes, which focus rather heavily on American contributions to the field. The chapter on diabetes and risk factors is one of the clearer and most comprehensive, but it presents almost none of the very extensive body of publications on the relationship between coronary artery disease and diabetes. The section on the effects of environmental factors on the atherosclerotic process could have benefited from a more comprehensive review. Overall this book is a useful and complete reference.