even premonition) is made of the association of Alzheimer’s disease with the apoE ε4 genotype, a finding that has set the field alight. As for “Hunting for Huntington’s disease” (Gusella and MacDonald), events over the past year have progressed so rapidly (in large part, it must be said, through the authors’ own efforts) that the chapter is of little more than historical interest. The article by T Friedmann “Milestones and events in the early development of human gene therapy” is a somewhat longer rehash of a recent review by the same author in Nature Genetics, and this subject has been well chronicled by others too.

Of the other three articles, it is good to see cancer making its first appearance in the series, given the remarkable contribution of molecular biology to its understanding. “Genetics of astrocytic tumor progression” (Mikkelsen) provides a reasonable overall introduction, but analysis of the particular tumour chosen seems to be several steps behind colon cancer, so that it does not provide an ideal illustrative model.

Probably the most successful chapter is “Molecular biology of cystic fibrosis” (Drumm and Collins). After the frenzy of activity during and after the cloning of the CFTR gene in 1989 (well described here), it is a good time to take stock as the first trials of cystic fibrosis gene therapy get under way.

What is most surprising is how much remains to be understood about the basic pathophysiology of cystic fibrosis. What are the regulatory elements controlling expression of the CFTR gene? Which CFTR mutations give rise to unstable mRNA and which to abnormal proteins? Which mutant proteins are transported to the plasma membrane and which fail to reach it? It seems that (at least in 1992) the answers to these questions, so crucial to the design of rational therapy, were still far from clear.

The proper emphasis on ethical issues continues with “Genetics, insurance, and the ethics of genetic counselling” (Rotstein). This subject was largely ignored until a couple of years ago but is now the subject of a growing bibliography. This article is certainly worth reading, although because it concentrates on the issues from a USA perspective, not all of it will apply in other countries.

ANDREW WILKIE


This valuable book is a landmark for the specialty of Medical Genetics, perhaps equivalent to Mendelian inheritance in man or Metabolic basis of inherited disease in its breadth and detail. Its importance is not because the topic itself is new – chapters on genetics of common disease have appeared over the years in various system orientated books and as reviews – but because this represents the first attempt to provide a definitive overall account of the genetic contribution to common diseases in general. Its very existence is a statement that genetics as a scientific discipline, and medical genetics as a clinical specialty, stand in the mainstream of medicine and cannot be relegated to the area of rare (and thus by implication less important) conditions.

Ten years ago this book could not have been written or, if it had, it would have been of limited value. What has changed the situation is, of course, the emergence of molecular genetics and the identification of specific genes involved in an abundance of different diseases. Until recently, these advances had their impact principally on mendelian disorders but now the focus is shifting rapidly to the role of specific cloned genes in the pathogenesis of and susceptibility to common diseases. It is probably true to say that most of the relevant research is now going on in departments other than those of Medical or Human Genetics, but the fact that the techniques and approaches owe so much to the earlier work on mendelian molecular genetics has made the links between Medical Genetics and other clinical specialties closer than ever before.

It is difficult in a work of this scope to single out chapters for individual mention; there is a uniformly high standard, with most authors being leaders in their specific fields. Diabetes, coronary heart disease, and the major psychoses are key subjects which are all covered clearly and in depth, but so are most systems. The introductory chapters provide a valuable foundation, especially for the non-geneticist.

This work is an essential companion for anyone involved in medical genetics as a clinician, while laboratory scientists will find it extremely helpful in filling out the picture of their research area, as will clinical specialists in the different disorder groups. The editors and authors are to be congratulated on bringing such an important book to fruition. They should already be giving thought as to how best to keep it updated in the face of the explosion of information that is appearing, and that will make regular renewal essential. The publishers will similarly need to use all the means possible to help them in this. Meanwhile, they can all feel justly satisfied with the book that they have created.

PETER S HARPER

Fifth European Neurofibromatosis Group Meeting

The Fifth European Neurofibromatosis Group Meeting will take place in Leuven, Belgium on 6-8 April 1995. Enquiries and further information: Dr Eric Legius, Centre for Human Genetics, Herestraat 49, 3000 Leuven, Belgium. Tel: (32) 16 345903; Fax: (32) 16 346051.

International Symposium on Genomic Imprinting

An International Symposium on Genomic Imprinting will take place at Palazzo dei Congressi, Florence, Italy on 20-22 November 1994. Further details from the Organising Secretariat, Human Genetics Service, Department of Paediatrics, University of Florence, 209 via Masaccio, 50132 Florence, Italy. Tel: (39) (55) 5662931/941; Fax: (39) (55) 570380.

EUROMEDECINE 94

The 10th International Medical and Pharmaceutical Research and Technology Meeting, EUROMEDECINE 94, will take place in Montpellier, France, from 10-13 November 1994. The scientific programme will include: Unstable Mutations (10 Nov), Congenital Cardiopathies: Genetics, Morphogenesis, Diagnosis and Therapy (10 Nov), Genetics of Gametes and Human Embryos (11 Nov), Psychological, Sociological and Economic Aspects of Predictive Medicine (11 Nov), Microcytogenetics (12 Nov), Genetic Pre-disposition to Breast Cancer (12 Nov), Mitochondrial Genetics (13 Nov), Genetic Data Banks (13 Nov). Contact Josette Roudat in Paris (tel: 33. 1. 43 54 30 00, fax: 33. 1. 43 54 85 91) and Anne-France Rouquette in Montpellier (tel: 33. 67 13 61 19, fax: 33. 67 13 61 10).