
The student of connective tissue disorders has had a lean time of late. Fortunately help is now at hand. After a lengthy period of drought, those with an interest in these conditions can now wallow in the luxury of choosing between two large multiauthor texts published almost simultaneously to plug a gap which has existed for over 20 years. Both of these volumes succeed admirably in providing up to date reference sources with coverage of all the remarkable progress achieved over the last two decades.

There is a striking similarity between these books which extends beyond their titles to size, authorship, format, and style. Surprisingly no author has contributed on an identical topic to each volume, although several distinguished names feature in both. Has there been an element of collusion in these publications? I hope not! In fact we should be grateful that for each disorder we now have two independent reviews which complement rather than duplicate one another. Individually each of these books is a mine of valuable information. Taken together they provide a tour de force.

Each text opens with an introductory chapter outlining the basic principles of human inheritance and medical genetics. These are followed by sections on connective tissue structure and function. Heritable Disorders for brevity with, for example, a single page devoted to elastin, which in contrast is the subject of its own 21 page chapter in Connective Tissue. Presumably this differing emphasis on basic biology reflects to some extent the background and interests of the respective editors. Peter Beighton seems to be catering primarily for medical geneticists, whereas Peter Royce and Beat Steinmann clearly have an eye on the basic scientist market also.

The remainder of both volumes is devoted to detailed accounts of individual connective tissue disorders. In maintaining the tradition of previous editions, Heritable Disorders is particularly strong on cutis laxa, the mucopolysaccharidoses, skeletal dysplasias, and the Weill-Marchesani syndrome. Connective Tissue barely mentions this last disorder but expands its coverage to include conditions with a secondary effect on connective tissue such as epidermolysis bullosa, proliase deficiency, and the ichthyoses. Generally the clinical contributions in Heritable Disorders are more lavishly illustrated and more expan
dive. For example its chapter on Marfan syndrome extends to 84 pages with 55 illustrations and 528 references, as compared with 31 pages, 11 illustrations, and 276 references in Connective Tissue. However, both provide extremely comprehensive reviews and pass with flying colours this reviewer's test of discouraging on the difficulty of confirming or refuting this particular diagnosis in equivocal clinical cases.

In summary, both of these books are excellent. Each provides a scholarly overview of their subject with no author trying to self-reg
dentifying departmental library can consider itself complete. Heritable Disorders scores highly in terms of cost and production quality with well illustrated pages, and larger type. This will probably be the first port of call for the practising clinician. Connective Tissue offers a more cosmopolitan authorship

with much greater depth in basic biology and science. Essentially "you pay your money and you take your choice". Either way you will not be disappointed.

I D YOUNG


This volume lives up to its name. It is concise, and covers the topics with which an undergraduate medical student should be familiar. It is useful for preclinical and clinical students, and provides a reasonable overview of the genetic basis of medicine. This fourth edition has been adequately updated. Already some details require amendment, but that is only to be expected. The only areas that I feel are "essential" and that have not been adequately covered are the closely connected areas of the psychosocial impact of genetics and the ethical issues raised in clinical genetic practice. These areas would be very difficult to cover in a volume of this sort, but I hope that they are attended to in the fifth edition that, I am sure, will deservedly follow before too long.

ANGUS CLARKE


As a family doctor with a special interest in medical genetics I read this book for my own education and also for possible inclusion on the patients' library shelf.

The opening chapter has a crusading quality and one assumes that the main readership is intended to be middle class America. Given the importance attached to non-directive genetic counselling, it is interesting to discern a slightly directive style. Dr Milunsky has clearly spent many years picking up the pieces following genetic catastrophes and he feels deeply about helping people to obtain the information to allow them to make the right choices. The issues raised are important and the comprehensive cover inspires one to read it although some may disagree with the observation that "compassion, patience and love are unusual in most families caring for a child with birth defect".

The reader with at least high school biology will find the chapters on chromosomes detailed and understandable and the simple explanations of medical genetics well welcomed. Here and elsewhere in the book doctors may benefit from technical descriptions of complex areas written for patients. Too often genetic nomenclature leaves even a medical graduate feeling like a stranger in a foreign country.

Problems of intersex are dealt with sensi--
itively but the reader looking for guidance on sex chromosome abnormalities, for example XXY or XYY detected at amniocentesis, may find this chapter unhelpful. The details of criminal trials involving defendants with XYY make uncomfortable reading. The separate chapter on fragile X is valuable because this alerts the reader to the salient features of the most common inherited cause of mental retardation and opens up avenues for seeking further guidance.

The chapter 'You and Your Genes' raises interesting questions about the mechanisms involved in the delayed onset of genetic diseases. This reader was grateful for the simple definition of a homeobox gene. However, the author omits to define hereditary and congenital which would be useful as these words are used throughout the book.

The chapter dealing with 'New Genetics' airs some difficult ethical dilemmas but it is surprising that the author does not place more emphasis on the reassurance given by negative genetic tests, and the consequent reduction of anxiety associated with reproduction. The short section on gene therapy does not mention cystic fibrosis, surely surprising when the hopes of so many patients are focused on this research.

The chapter on 'Genes, Ethnic Origins and Blood Groups' is probably too complicated for the lay reader, although the subject matter will be of great interest to a multi-racial readership.

There is a dispassionate discussion of the relationship of IQ to race and the interaction between genetic endowment and environment.

The chapter on 'Genetic Counselling' begins with the aphorism "...by not knowing you do not remove the chances you remove the choices". Dr Milunsky's commitment to helping couples avoid children with genetic defects is matched by a most valuable chapter which deals objectively with the practical and ethical issues raised by genetic counselling. It would be a useful teaching aid for students. 'Drugs, Infections, X-rays and Habits Harmful to the Fetus' gives sensible and comprehensive guidance to anyone contemplating pregnancy.

The problems of population screening for Tay-Sachs disease, sickle cell disease, and thalassaemia are addressed in this book. It is timely to consider that genetics should be taken to the people rather than the individual patient taking his genetic problem to the doctor. This book goes some way to beginning this process. However, screening programmes should be undertaken only after extensive pilot studies and as a partnership process between the patient, the family doctor, medical geneticists, and others.

The section on the inheritance of common disease will leave the family doctor and his patients disappointed that clear genetic markers are still rare for breast cancer, ischaemic heart disease, colon cancer, and Alzheimer's disease. Such genetic markers as do exist show how these could translate into practical applications. Milunsky makes lifestyle recommendations which will be useful for both patient and doctor and the risk tables provided for some diseases will be helpful in the consulting room. The message undoubtedly is that family doctors should elicit, and patients should expect, a family history of common diseases to be taken. As the effects of the new genetics increases the precision of risk estimation, patients and relatives can be identified and offered appropriate advice and screening.

The legal lessons in prenatal diagnosis give only American examples but the points made are valid. Issues covered include the right to information, the right to choice, and the right that medical consultation should be free from the personal and religious bias of the doctor.

This is the comprehensively revised text of Choices Not Chances by the same author published in 1989. The information is as up to date as possible in this fast moving field where significant advances may happen between printing and publications.

I found reading this book a useful exercise, and many doctors will profit by having a copy handy when explaining things to patients or students. For more sophisticated patients and relatives, it will complement the information sheets produced by genetic charities and patient organisations.

HILARY J HARRIS