
BOOK REVIEWS

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The foreword sets the scene. “The recombinant DNA process patented in 1980 opened stunning possibilities that, in a single decade, bring in a new era of ‘pharmaceuticals’ and the ‘disease modifying’ drugs, which may enable us to prevent and treat a wide range of genetic diseases.”

The book is divided into five parts: From the basic principles, through the practical aspects of genetic therapy, the biological, ethical, and social implications, to the future of genetic therapy.

The book is written in a non-technical language and is suitable for biologists, physicians, geneticists, and medical practitioners. It is also of interest to the general public.


The book is divided into four parts: The Roots, The Rise, The Rising, and The Realities. Each part is divided into chapters that describe the activities of environmental groups and individuals.

The book is written in a non-technical language and is suitable for environmentalists, teachers, students, and anyone interested in the modern environmental movement.


This book is subtitled “Genetic and teratologic epidemiological studies” and describes a systematic and exhaustive study of nearly 1000 cases with congenital limb deficiency born in Hungary between 1975 and 1984. Hungary maintains a national computerized record of information on affected infants and pregnancies of those with congenital limb deficiencies, because of prenatally diagnosed developmental defects, during the second and third trimester. From this database all cases with a limb reduction deformity were ascertained and diagnosed confirmed by personal ex- amination or evaluation of medical records. Hungary has a birth rate of approximately 150,000 per year. Notification to the Hun- garian Congenital Abnormality and Register (HCAR) is the task of obstetricians and pa- diatricians and because notification is re- quired every time an affected child is admitted to a medical institution, ascertainment is nearly complete.

The first chapter is a fascinating and well illustrated account of the history of limb de- fects spanning two and a half thousand years, from the clay tablets of Nineveh to the present day. There follows a description of the Hun- garian systems for the evaluation of congenital abnormalities. The design of this study of congenital limb deficiency and the sub- division into isolated cases and those with congenital abnormality.

The morphological classification which forms the basis for further evaluation is then in- troduced. Each of the six morphological groups, terminal transverse, amniogenic, ra- dial and tubal, ulnar and fibular, split hand and foot, and proximal intercalary defects, are then evaluated in a systematic manner.

The study’s strengths are the enormous volume of data amassed in a population with nearly complete ascertainment, and the pains- taking and detailed manner in which the data have been collected and evaluated. The fig- ures for the prevalence of various categories of congenital limb deficiency are a major contribution to the field. Its main weakness lies in the reliance on a morphological clas- sification as the starting point for epi- demiological evaluation of aetiology. Study of the range of limb defects that can be observed in different limbs of a single child, and hence presumably inherited, is not- ively, casts intuitive doubt on the value of this approach. The eventual aetiological clas- sification of isolated CLD groups ends by citing vascular disruption as an important aetiological factor in four of the six categories, with no recognised factors for atypical split hand and foot and early amnion rupture, arguably itself a result of vascular disruption, cited in the sixth (amniogenic) group.

The disappointing messages emerge from this book is that despite a huge and thorough research effort, only a few en- vironmental factors such as smoking emerge as potential aetiological factors. Even then, the relative risks observed are small.

The book has accompanied me now on two holidays, which suggests that it is not a very easy read! It will not find a place on the bookshelf of most practising clinical genet- icians, nor it expect a great deal of interest from laboratory and departmental libraries. It should, however, be required reading for anyone considering setting up a Congenital Abnormality Register, and will be of interest to everyone engaged in research into congenital limb defects.

ANDREW O M WILKIE


HELEN FIRTH