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BOOK REVIEWS

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Fetal Medicine: Prenatal Diagnosis and Management. Editor André Boué. (Pp 292; £50.00). Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1995. ISBN 0 1926 1904.

With the rapid increase in mapping and cloning of genes for many human diseases, more and more prenatal diagnosis becomes technically possible. Newer methods, such as interphase FISH for prenatal diagnosis of chromosomal aneuploidies, are now beginning to emerge on the clinical scene. Faced with the prospect of being superseded almost immediately, the production of a textbook covering such an expanding field is a daunting task.

Undaunted, Boué *et al* have written a comprehensive textbook which covers a wide range of topics. They include sections on basic cytogenetics and molecular genetics, as well as detailed descriptions of the procedures involved both in prenatal sampling and in sample analysis. The book does not set out to cover all the areas of fetal medicine, and issues such as ultrasound based diagnosis, isoimmunisation, or exchange transfusion are specifically excluded. However, the use of prenatal diagnosis in the management of maternal viral infection is covered, with detailed discussion of the relative merits of specific diagnostic tests. It is clear from the text that a great resource of practical experience in prenatal diagnosis in France has been brought together, and that the authors have a deep understanding of the problems and pitfalls in fetal medicine.

The book is aimed at obstetricians, general practitioners, and paediatricians, to help them address the questions asked by their patients. There is an appropriate emphasis on detection of chromosomal aneuploidies, but the short section on maternal serum screening does not discuss the improved detection brought about by triple marker screening. A large chapter on prenatal diagnosis of single gene disorders covers both biochemical and DNA based diagnosis of a wide range of conditions. For some diseases, there are discussions of the clinical genetic issues for families at different degrees of risk. There is a considerable amount of detail on the specific DNA markers used in different monogenic conditions. All the markers mentioned are RFLPs analysed by Southern blot, which in many cases have now been superseded by PCR based microsatellites, of which there is no mention. The amount of technical detail may be somewhat overwhelming for the general reader, especially as such detail must inevitably become outdated. There is only a brief reference to PCR in the section on molecular methods, which is unfortunate, as PCR is not the mainstay of DNA technology in molecular diagnostic laboratories.

The editor has wisely included a chapter on ethical issues in prenatal diagnosis, and focuses on the ethical implications of "screening" for genetic disease in selected populations, citing the statements of the French National Consultative Committee on Ethics. Boué also rightly emphasises that prenatal diagnosis needs a multidisciplinary approach, and involves obstetricians, clinical and laboratory geneticists, and ultrasonographic expertise.

This textbook also draws together information from different disciplines, and has successfully covered a large area of the management of pregnancies at increased risk of disease. Even though the editor accepts that the volume will rapidly be superseded, the core of this textbook will remain valuable for a considerable time to come.

ANDREW GREEN

Catalog of Teratogenic Agents. 8th edition. T H Shepard. (Pp 542; £76.00.) Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1995. ISBN 0 8018 51823.

Champions of the electronic age claim that reference books are now outdated, to be replaced by online databases and CD-ROM based information retrieval. This new edition

of a well known and comprehensive catalog(ue) shows that there is still a place for high quality, well indexed, and up to date reference books. The author has built on the work of previous editions to produce a clear and well referenced book covering the teratological effects of many pharmacological agents, as well as physical agents, maternal viral infection, pesticides, specific occupations, and even such events as a maternal suicide attempt.

The style is reminiscent of other publications from the Johns Hopkins University Press, and the book has been generated by a computer program similar to that used to produce another major catalog(ue), *Mendelian Inheritance in Man*. For each entry there is a presentation of the relevant data in sequence, starting with human epidemiological studies, thence to case reports of teratogenic effects in humans, and finally to animal experiments, followed by a comprehensive reference list. The author wisely does not attempt to classify an agent into a specific grading of severity, but cites the data and allows the reader to make an appropriate interpretation. For some agents, he may preface the entry with a clear, brief summary of the issues for a particular suspected teratogen, or cite a major review of the issue.

The individual teratogenicity of illegal drugs is well covered. The practical issue of the interaction of these agents in a mother who takes several such drugs together is often more difficult to address. The teratogenicity of newer designer hallucinogens is as yet unknown, especially with the variable purity of such agents. The same caveats must also apply for new medicines coming onto the market, as their human teratogenic effects are as yet unknown, and cannot be covered in a catalogue such as this. The point about species variability in thalidomide teratogenicity is well made.

Specific entries dealing with issues such as folate deficiency, anticonvulsants, and cytotoxic agents are clear and to the point. There are the odd transatlantic differences in nomenclature which make tracking a particular agent difficult, but once found the data are well presented. There is a good and interesting entry on the teratogenicity of video display terminals, and Shepard quotes that it is a "shame that we may be terrorizing a generation of women without a clear scientific imperative to do so". This is the only indirectly expressed opinion in the catalogue that I could find, which reflects the clear thinking and scientific approach of the author.

I would recommend this book for its breadth of entries and clarity of presentation. It shows that there is still a place for a good book in a world of electronic information.

ANDREW GREEN

Principles and Practice of Sleep Medicine in the Child. R Ferber, M Kryger. (Pp 254; £33.00.) UK: Harcourt Brace & Co. 1995. ISBN 0 7216 4761 8.

There is much evidence that persistent sleep disturbance is very common and that it can have serious psychological or even physical effects, and yet this topic is often marginalised or ignored in professional teaching and training courses. Sleep disturbance specific to children generally receives even less attention. However, this book would provide a clinician