in families with IP may, however, be fruitful in the search for the gene.

ELI HATCHWELL
Wessex Clinical Genetics Service, Princess Anne Hospital, Level G, Cosford Road, Southampton SO16 7YA, UK


BOOK REVIEWS

If you wish to order or require further information regarding the titles reviewed here, please write to or telephone the BMJ Bookshop, PO Box 295, London WC1H 9JR. Tel 0171 383 6244. Fax 0171 383 6662. Books are supplied post free in the UK and for BFPO addresses customers should add 15% for postage and packing. Payment can be made by cheque in sterling drawn on a UK bank or by credit card (Mastercard, Visa, or American Express) stating card number, name on card, date, and full name. (The price and availability are occasionally subject to revision by the Publishers.)


The diagnosis of a rare condition in a child understandably raises many questions for that child's parents and relatives. Such queries are usually posed to the paediatrician or GP caring for the child. However, there are a wider range of health professionals involved in the care of the child who need information about a condition, both for themselves, and to answer the questions inevitably posed to them. Often parents ask "how did it happen?", "can you treat it?", "will it happen again?", and many more are well addressed in this reference book.

Dr Gilbert has produced an expanded second edition of her book, designed to inform health professionals and families after a syndrome diagnosis has been made. It has been specifically written in non-technical language, aimed at a generalist audience, who may or may not have a broad medical knowledge. Twenty new syndromes have been included at the request of readers, giving a total of 90 conditions, the majority of which will be familiar. This is assisted by a clear appendix containing a good review of basic genetics by Peter Farendon. A useful glossary is also included. There is an alphabetic listing of each syndrome, with 1000 words or more providing a description of the condition, incidence, history, causation, characteristics, management, and future developments. The descriptions show that Dr Gilbert has had extensive first hand experience in the care and management of children with rare disorders.

The inclusion of the addresses of support group associations, Contact-A-Family, and the UK clinical genetics centres also shows her understanding of parents' needs. The language used for the most part is clear and simple to understand.

No such book could aim to cover all the rare syndromes. The author states that she can only cover one syndrome per chapter. Her book is in fact an A–W of syndromes, although she could have made it an A–Z by including Zellweger's syndrome! There are also a few minor problems, such as the absence of any discussion of fetal alcohol syndrome in Alport's syndrome, the omission of epilepsy as a complication of neurofibromatosis, and a rather unclear distinction between Finnish nephrotic syndrome and the many other causes of nephrotic syndrome. There is also no reference to the finding of an expanded triplet repeat causing fragile X syndrome, explaining the unusual inheritance. The index contains a list of signs and symptoms found in different syndromes, similar to that seen in Gorlin's Syndromes of the Head and Neck, ostensibly as an aid to diagnosis. In fact, this volume is better used as a reference once a diagnosis has already been made. The lack of photographs also makes this volume more suited to the role of a lay reference work, rather than a diagnostic aid.

Overall, this is an excellent reference book for a wide range of health and educational professionals. It provides clear clinical information, and can give a quick snapshot of a condition for many people involved in the care of children with rare disorders.

ANDREW GREEN


People who advise pregnant women need to keep up with developments in genetics. Parents always want to know the risks of passing a condition to their children or whether anything can be done to reduce these. Often the first person they ask is their obstetrician or midwife. This book, edited by a distinguished team from the United States and Israel, aims to provide the information required. It has some good features but these are outweighed by many faults.

The book opens with six chapters on general aspects of genetic diseases, including specifically preconception counselling, chromosomal problems, and intellectual retardation. These deal with these problems in a similar way to most textbooks of genetics, albeit very briefly and with some important omissions. The book then changes character, and in the remaining 12 chapters a range of authors each tackle the genetic aspects of a specific maternal pregnancy problem, including the main medical problems that occur in pregnancy, renal, cardiac, haematological, neurological, and psychiatric disease, etc. This is a nice idea since, for generalists caring for pregnant women, these multifactorial conditions must be much more common than the single gene defects on which most traditional genetic texts concentrate, and some chapters are very successful. However, for some diseases, once it has been stated that the inheritance is multifactorial, and the empirical recurrence risk given, there is little more to say. Unfortunately, this has not deterred contributors from padding out their chapters with platitudes, irrelevances, and repetitions, and the whole book cries out for stronger editing.

The arrangement also leads to oddities. For example, cystic fibrosis (CF) appears only in chapters on anaesthesia and gastrointestinal disease. The reason for this is not clear, but it may be to have a chapter on CF counselling and prenatal diagnosis for normal women without or with a family history. There are other many omissions and imbalances. Some are serious and others simply strange. For example, myotonic dystrophy gets only five lines in one of the introductory chapters while multiple sclerosis gets 10 pages later on. It is unacceptable for a large genetics text in 1996 to omit any linkage and the reason for this is not clear. The book contains an essay on pre-eclampsia of any mention of the familial pattern of this disease. Readers will not learn that many experts even believe, albeit wrongly in my view, that this fascinating and common condition might be inherited in simple mendelian fashion, and that a number of groups are already doing gene linkage studies. They should be told.

This book bears all the hallmarks of being dished out by busy authors and editors with more important calls on their time. I cannot recommend it.

J G THORNTON


This book contains the published proceedings of an excellent Ciba Symposium on the molecular biology and pathology of elastic tissues held in Kenya in 1994. As one expects of Ciba Symposium proceedings, the book is beautifully produced and very portable. Furthermore, it has been published within less than 12 months.

North American dominance in the field is very evident with 72% of the chapters and a