

Book reviews

Neoplastic Diseases of the Blood

P. H. Wiernik, J. M. Goldman, J. P. Dutcher, R. A. Kyle (eds). Fourth edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2003, 1196 pp, £245.00

Without question, this is the most comprehensive, almost encyclopaedic textbook on leukaemias, myeloproliferative and myelodysplastic syndromes and lymphomas presently available. Written by a large number of authorities in different fields, the book is divided into five sections (chronic leukaemias and related disorders; acute leukaemias; myeloma and related disorders; lymphomas; supportive care). Each section begins with a chapter on historical perspectives that is fascinating to read and at the same time useful because it leads the reader to realise the enormous progress that has been achieved during the last century and particularly during the last 40 years. Epidemiology, pathology and morphology, molecular biology, immunobiology, genetics, classification, staging and treatment of various disease entities follow, and each chapter ends with an unbeatable collection of hundreds of references. Probably unavoidable are repetitions in a number of chapters, and the question arises whether the authors of the various chapters always knew about the content of the preceding and following ones. Considerable efforts have been undertaken to present up to date knowledge, successfully so in the majority of chapters. The chapter on cytochemical and morphological classification of acute leukaemias, however, is outdated: immunophenotyping of acute lymphoblastic leukaemia (ALL) is not only 'useful' but mandatory, and the FAB classification of ALL has become irrelevant. The authors should have concentrated on the WHO classification rather than presenting a confusing hybrid of FAB and WHO for acute leukaemias and myelodysplastic syndromes. For the lymphomas, the WHO classification has been used consequently. Particularly valuable is the section on supportive care, which covers prevention, diagnosis and treatment of bacterial, fungal and viral infections, transfusion medicine including haematopoietic stem cell support, various aspects of allotransplantation, growth factor support and psychological aspects of patients with haematological neoplasias.

As stated in the preface, it was the editors' aim to design an encyclopaedic resource for established haematologists and medical oncologists taking care of adults and children. The reviewer believes that this aim has been achieved magnifi-

cently. This is a carefully edited, very good book, and nothing comparable is on the market.

D. K. Hossfeld
Hamburg, Germany

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Principles of Molecular Oncology

M. H. Bronchud, M. A. Foote, G. Giaccone, O. Olopade, P. Workman (eds). Second edition, Humana Press, 2004, 736pp, US\$ 149.50

No fewer than three prominent professors have been recruited to write forewords to this revised edition of a rather successful book on 'molecular oncology', a field very much in the limelight these days. Its content is described in the editorials as a 'bold look at the evolution of our knowledge of cancer', as a 'lucid ... account of ... one of the genuine success stories of molecular medicine', and as 'providing valuable information for the continuing education of all oncologists.' A quick browse through its pages, and much more so some concentrated reading of excerpts from its columns will prove, that the editorialists do not exaggerate. There is indeed much valuable information in each of the chapters, the references are extensive (typically several 100 per section) and updated to the year 2003. I particularly liked chapter 9 on 'Growth factor signalling pathways in cancer', where entire molecular pathways are described rather than redundant lists of single cancer genes. The essay on oestrogen action and breast cancer (section 10) is to my mind particularly authoritative and concise, just as much as chapter 6 on 'Molecular diagnostics of cancer', which provides a neat overview of tumour clonality analyses, molecular cytogenetics and expression profiling. All is well then, and nothing to criticise? Not quite, I am afraid, since I do need to bring up a number of quibbles. They do not really mar the overall appeal of this book, but some points could have been improved, and must be taken care of in future editions. I fail to see why 'traditional' circulating serum tumour markers such as AFP or CEA find a place in this book, and there are far better overviews on these routine markers available in the literature and in many textbooks of oncology. The chapter on the 'Clinical importance of prognostic factors' is certainly well written, but it does not focus on molecular oncology, nor are its data derived to any great extent from molecular studies. Why discuss BCL-1 and BCL-2 twice in separate sections of the same chapter on 'Genetic markers in sporadic tumours'? The opening article on

'The right targets for cancer therapy' turns out to be a very broad survey of topics such as diets in cancer, molecular oncology (as you would expect), tumour clonality issues, trends in mortality due to cancer, hereditary predisposition to cancer, and others. Whilst I do not deny that these various issues, heterogeneous as they are, are well discussed, I somewhat miss a clear focus of this chapter. Finally, the graphic presentation of the book is less than ideal, with too few tables, and too few explanatory figures or graphs. It has been said that a picture is worth a thousand words or so. Perhaps this advice might also be considered for oncology textbooks such as this one. On a positive vein, the various chapters are written

in an authoritative style and in a timely fashion. For clinical oncologists without a specific interest in the molecular biology of cancer, and for medical students, the book is perhaps too detailed and too basic. However, anyone working on cancer problems in an academic setting will be able to pull out much valuable information from this work's columns.

M. F. Fey

Institute of Medical Oncology, Inselspital and University,
Berne, Switzerland

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