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Book Reviews

Therapeutics in Respiratory Disease

P. J. Barnes, K. F. Chung, T. W. Evans and S. G. Spiro

Edinburgh, U.K.: Churchill Livingstone, 1994, 174 pages, £40.00.

Over recent years, there have been a number of advances in the development of new therapies in respiratory medicine. The aim of this book is to concentrate on therapeutics, rather than to produce a comprehensive textbook on respiratory disease.

In order to develop an integrated approach throughout the book, the authors state in the preface that they have limited the contributors to avoid the multiauthor format of most modern textbooks, thus the individual chapters are not signed. With respect to this, the book is largely successful, without unnecessary repetition, though it is a pity that chronic obstructive airways diseases are COAD in one chapter and COPD in another.

The book starts with a useful chapter on general principles of pharmacology, as applied to respiratory disease, and is followed by an excellent and up-to-date chapter on the use of drugs in chronic obstructive airways diseases. While most of the other chapters use comprehensive tables and lists, the chapter on airways obstruction is also well-illustrated. There are chapters on respiratory failure, infections and tuberculosis, with excellent contributions on lung cancer and pulmonary vascular disease. The book ends with relatively short chapters on drug-induced lung disease, cough and breathlessness. The management of disabling breathlessness, which is covered briefly in both the section on lung cancer and in the chapter on cough and breathlessness, deserves more attention. There are relatively few references at the end of the chapters, though they mainly include reviews on the particular topic.

One of the most useful aspects of this book are the plans for therapy. Although this is easiest to achieve in the chapter on asthma, there are also clear treatment regimens described in the other chapters. An important function of this book would be as a reference for the doctor in training. One of the commonest and most difficult problems that they will experience is the management of acute exacerbations of COPD with respiratory failure. However, discussion of this important topic is split between two chapters and perhaps a clearer stepwise plan could have been produced.

This book will be a worthwhile addition to hospital and departmental libraries. It will also be particularly useful for respiratory physicians, who have to prepare undergraduate or postgraduate lectures, as the tables and figures are clear and well-constructed.

J. A. Wedzicha

Indoor Allergens

A. W. Pope, R. Patterson and H. Burge, eds

Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 1993, 308 pages, £28.95.

This comprehensive book was written with the aim of providing the most up-to-date information on the vast area of indoor allergens and was prepared by the Committee on the Health Effects of Indoor Allergens. The editors are renowned medical, public health and engineering professionals who present the committee's findings, conclusions and recommendations on several aspects of the problem of indoor allergens.

This well-structured and very readable book focuses primarily on airborne allergenic agents of biological origin in the home and work environment, but also deals with industrial/occupational allergens. The whole range of currently known aeroallergens are covered, with abundant information about the topic provided throughout the book. The book is based on a very thorough review of the literature, and additionally it lists the important books on immunology and allergy which give helpful background information. The graphs and figures are clear and well-presented in various forms. At the end of each chapter, there is a 'Conclusions and Recommendations' section setting out specific guidelines on avoidance measures and future research into the link between allergy and environmental factors.

However, in view of the recent findings of the role of human airway epithelium in the development of allergic airway diseases, the report is somewhat lacking since the discussion on this important subject is very brief, and limited to the role of epithelium as only a physical barrier, which is clearly not the case.

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