BOOK REVIEW

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF MEDICAL GENETICS VOLUMES 1 AND 2. Edited by A. E. H. Emery and D. L. Rimoin. Churchill Livingstone, 1983. 1502Pp. Price: £85.00

Drs Emery and Rimoin planned these two volumes to be a text book of medical genetics for clinicians and geneticists alike. As the subject of medical genetics has greatly expanded in the last ten years, they considered that a single reference source would be valuable and for this purpose they chose an impressive array of contributors who were asked to write on their particular area of expertise rather than to produce review chapters. It is remarkable that nearly all these contributors have conformed to the editorial request to be brief and concise and to adopt a consistent plan for each chapter. In this way the criticisms of uneven standard and inconsistent approach that usually apply to a multi-author textbook do not apply here.

The first section on basic principles provides a scientific introduction to the following 80 chapters which cover clinical aspects. This scientific section is much better than those usually found in clinical books, and alone would provide an excellent text for the junior medical students, as it ranges from molecular biology through the mathematics of multifactorial inheritance to infertility.

The medical topics are composed of those subjects about which the contributors are experts and are therefore of high standard. At the same time comprehensive cover is achieved and it is difficult to think of important topics in medical genetics that are not described. The chapters are diverse and as well as including the major systems, there are accounts of some relatively common disorders where genetic factors are likely to participate in their aetiology; epilepsy, alcoholism, squint, scoliosis, peptic ulcer. There are also helpful accounts on how to approach malformation syndromes and the bone dysplasias, and there is a final section on applied genetics which includes counselling, screening, prenatal diagnosis and testing for parentage.

Each chapter is concise and follows a consistent pattern of describing the clinical features, pathology and relevant investigations for a disease; then the genetic mechanisms and genetic risks; and finally the psychological and sociological aspects of genetic counselling. Well-chosen photographs illustrate many of the clinical features and much useful data are tabulated. In these ways the book is truly a textbook for clinical geneticists, whose knowledge is expected to cover a wide range of medical topics and who from time to time need to refresh or update the facts relating to less common conditions; we have already found it helpful when faced with an unexpected problem in a genetic clinic. The genetic sections for each subject are predictably more practical when written by a clinical geneticist than by a system specialist, for whereas both cover the genetic types well, it is the clinical geneticist who suggests what risks to give an isolated case and who emphasises the importance of examining parents. It is perhaps a pity that only one contributor discussed polygenic inheritance in relation to disease; there were several opportunities for others to do so.

We predict that this book is likely to become a classic. It is a reliable and valuable textbook of medical genetics and should be on the reference shelves of every medical library and every library used by geneticists.

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