Book Review

Advanced Medicine 19. Edited by K. B. Saunders. Pitman Publishing, London, 1983. Price £20.

I look forward each year to the publication of the proceedings of the annual Advanced Medicine Conference at the Royal College of Physicians of London and this year has proved to be no exception. As usual, the book is multi-authored, each chapter representing the various papers given at the conference. The topics covered include those of daily use to the practising clinician, such as the sections on renal medicine and respiratory medicine, while others, such as the section on molecular genetics, are more scientific and help one keep up to date in areas in which the original papers are difficult to follow and which are not always, regrettably, covered in my general reading.

The book does not aim to cover all the advances in a given field but tends to highlight certain areas. Professor Chantler’s chapter on renal failure in children and Dr Gokal’s chapter on continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis demonstrate the advances in treatment of renal failure, especially in the young and elderly. Professor Chantler’s paper ends on the optimistic note that 80 per cent of children with end stage renal failure can now expect to be alive as adults. Dr Ward’s paper on aluminium toxicity in renal failure demonstrates how a new disease entity can be created by new technology, and how, once recognised, it can be prevented—a cautionary tale for us all. The section on endocrinology includes a very useful review by Dr Clayton of the clinical results of abnormal hormone receptor interactions. There is also a fascinating paper on the development of methods for the detection of endocrine tumours by the use of labelled antibodies.

One of the most enjoyable sessions of the whole conference was the morning devoted to medicine in the Third World and this is reflected in the excellent section in this book. Dr Warrell’s paper is particularly fascinating. It is an account of cerebral malaria and louse-borne relapsing fever, two diseases seldom met by the average clinician practising in the UK. Dr Yudkin’s paper on the use and misuse of drugs in the Third World is disturbing and should give drug companies a guilty conscience. An important cause of disease in the Third World is malnutrition and Dr Waterlow highlights this problem and demonstrates that even now more research is needed in this area.

One of the best chapters is that of Dr Marsden on paroxysmal movement disorders. He succeeds in turning a subject which usually consists of long lists into something interesting. He manages this by giving case histories of patients with these disorders, a ploy which could be used more often when describing clinical conditions.

The two lectures at the end of the book were both most enjoyable when initially listened to, and both also make excellent reading. Dr Batten’s Croonian lecture on cystic fibrosis demonstrates another area where advances in medical care have improved dramatically both the quality and expectancy of living. Professor Kerr’s Lumleian lecture on uraemia is an excellent summary of the advances in the understanding of this difficult clinical syndrome, yet also demonstrates that many aspects are still poorly understood.

As with all multi-author books, some chapters are less good than others and there is no overall style. This problem, however, is unavoidable with a book which is a conference report. Attending the Advanced Medicine Conference is one of the most enjoyable ways of keeping up to date in areas other than one’s own and for those who have been unfortunate enough not to be able to attend the conference, this book is an excellent second best and at £20 is very good value.