Book reviews

The Diagnosis and Treatment of Pituitary Insufficiency
S. W. J. Lamberts (Ed.)
BioScientifica Ltd, 1997, pp. 296, £29.95, ISBN: 1-901978-00-1

When the experts meet, it is fatal that this will result in the production of a book, the previous lack of which would have caused no complaint. In general, the book reflects a high grade of dishomogeneity, as the editorial work is limited to assembling reluctantly written papers, and a too-extended time lapse between the meeting and publication date. The volume ‘The Diagnosis and Treatment of Pituitary Insufficiency’ fully contradicts these general rules. The book is announced as the first of a series of volumes collecting the thoughts of a panel of experts meeting at the Hypopituitary Control and Complication Study (HypoCCS) Symposia.

The need for a reappraisal of clinical problems related to hypopituitarism is dictated by the recent introduction of somatotropin replacement therapy which has led us to reconsider not only the diagnosis of growth hormone deficiency in adults, the related metabolic effects and complications and their impact on the quality (and even duration) of life, but also the entire matter of epidemiology, aetiology, pathogenesis, diagnosis and treatment of hypopituitarism.

The volume starts with a comprehensive review of symptoms, signs and long-term outcomes of adulthood acquired hypopituitarism (R.N. Clayton) and with the fascinating story of Pit-1 expression in isolated or combined pituitary hormone defects (R. Pfaffle & G. Heimann) that, alone, would have justified the publication of the book. Then it proceeds with the systematic review of anterior pituitary hormone deficiencies and of the reciprocal interactions between somatotropin administration and the respective replacement therapies (G.P. Chrousos, D.G. Johnston et al. and T.A. Howlett for ACTH; J.A. Franklyn, P. Beck-Peccoz et al. for TSH; S. Franks & D.M. White, K.K.Y. Ho & A.J. O’Sullivan, B.D. Anawalt & W.J. Bremer, and A. Giustina & C. Cappelli for gonadotropins; P.H. Baylis and E.A. van der Veen et al. for antidiuretic hormone).

Finally, the practical aspects of the diagnosis of growth hormone deficiency in adults (A.J. van der Lely et al.) and therapeutic strategies (S.M. Shalet & S.R. Peacey) conclude the book. Such editorial organization appropriately compensates the unavoidable disequilibrium of a multiauthor text and provides the necessary homogeneity. The reported discussion between the participants enlivens the text and helps in bringing into focus the most controversial issues. The interval between the Symposium and the publication has been short enough to preserve the freshness of the contents. I found reading the book to be enjoyable and profitable, and, not of lesser importance, it stimulates thinking. The volume was published thanks to an educational grant from Ely Lilly & Co.

Giovanni Faglia

Atlas of Tumor Pathology Tumors of the Pituitary Gland.
Sylvia L. Asa, (Ed)
Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, 1998, pp. 214, $60, ISBN: 1-881041-44-1

The latest fascicle from the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology is a slim volume on tumours and tumour-like conditions of the pituitary gland and related structures. Dr Asa’s contribution maintains the excellence of the series with a very clear account of pituitary disease. The fascicle opens with the normal anatomy, embryology and physiology then moves on to the classification and description of the different pathological entities. Illustrations are almost all excellent and most are in colour. The text is written in an engaging style (with asides—I learned that Goliath’s bitemporal hemianopia contributed to his defeat by David and that the term craniopharyngioma was introduced by Cushing).

I found only one or two minor problems. In a table of antibodies recommended for routine immunostaining of pituitary tumours ACTH is unaccountably missing, until one reads in the text that the authors of a large French study did not evaluate it. I could find no mention of intermediate zone tumours in the index or text. The histological distinction between craniopharyngiomas and Rathke’s cleft cysts is not clearly made, though this is important in view of the possibly different rates of recurrence. The presence of β-hCG in craniopharyngiomas is not mentioned.

On the whole this is a very worthwhile book to have, both for diagnosis of hypophysectomy specimens and for the most up-to-date ideas on pathogenesis, molecular pathology, epidemiology and classification of pituitary and related pathology.

D. G. Lowe