

Book Reviews

Atlas of Infectious Diseases, Volume 5: Sexual Transmitted Disease. Editor-in-Chief G. L. Mandell; Ed. M. F. Rein. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, 1996. £95.00 (pb). ISBN 0 443 077207.

My initial reaction on seeing this book was – is there really a need for another book of gruesome genital lesions? An excellent and comprehensive Atlas of Sexually Transmitted Diseases, which left nothing to the imagination and will no doubt have caused nightmares for readers with guilty consciences, was published some 5 years ago by Gower Medical Publishing; could it be improved on?

The answer is 'Yes'. This new book, which comprises Volume 5 of a series on infectious diseases edited by Dr G. L. Mandell, is superb. Chapter authors are all internationally acknowledged leaders in their fields; the quality of the photographs is unsurpassable; and in addition to clinical pictures, laboratory diagnostic tests are displayed in a way that even those with no laboratory background can easily appreciate. Moreover, the epidemiology of the diseases described is set out in a series of beautiful graphics, so that they can be taken in at a glance.

There are 18 chapters: 15 devoted to specific infections, one each devoted to the syndromes of bacterial vaginosis and pelvic inflammatory disease; and a final chapter on physical examination and diagnostic techniques. I have only two minor criticisms: in some cases the final page layout has been careless, so that a caption refers to the wrong illustration. This is a minor irritant to the reader, but must have caused intense anguish to authors who had taken so much trouble over the text and illustrations. And there is little or no mention of syndromic management, which is recommended by the WHO for centres where laboratory facilities are poor or absent. Books such as this tend to reinforce the erroneous notion that, for example, chancroid and syphilis can be reliably distinguished by clinical appearance alone. But it has to be admitted that its influence is unlikely to be strongly felt in the developing world, since few there will be able to afford it.

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Principles and practice of infectious diseases: antimicrobial therapy. G. L. Mandell, R. G. Douglas, J. E. Bennett and R. Dolin. Pp. 192. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, 1996. £12.50 (pb). ISBN 0 443 07844 0.

This most useful publication is produced in pocket book format, so it fits into a white coat or can be carried without difficulty in a brief case. The authors, responsible for the standard infectious diseases textbook that goes under the same name, have produced this work to provide up-to-date guidance for the therapy of known or suspected infectious diseases. The book meets this aim admirably.

Nine sections make up the book, which are as follows: (1) a summary of antimicrobial agents by class, as would be included in undergraduate or postgraduate microbiology courses; (2) empirical therapy for infectious syndromes, including both adult and paediatric conditions; (3) preferred specific therapy for individual pathogens; (4) treatment for sexually transmitted diseases; (5) treatment of HIV-associated conditions; (6) recommendations concerning prophylaxis; (7) use of antimicrobials during pregnancy; (8) dosages and intervals for individual antimicrobial agents, in adults and children; (9) a list of generic and trade names.

The authors of this book are from the United States, and some of the priority choices of treatments may differ from in the United Kingdom. Some irritating typographical errors have escaped detection, and some subjects are omitted (e.g. prophylaxis following occupational exposure to HIV). Other subjects that could have been covered include vaccines and travel-associated infections. Some recommendations, such as those concerning antiretroviral therapy for persons infected with HIV, may change in the near future, and inevitably, summary statements mask the complexity of some conditions and their treatment. Overall, however, this is a most useful little book that will help the specialist and non-specialist alike to make rational and safe therapeutic choices for patients with infectious diseases.

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