want a succinct source of comparative information on the oral cephalosporins as a group, then this may be the book for you. The eight chapters, mainly by authors in continental Europe, are admirably up to date and cover everything from chemical properties of the agents to adverse reactions, stopping off along the way to consider therapeutic use in upper and lower respiratory tract and urinary tract infections. Coverage is quite comprehensive, although there is an understandable tendency to dwell on the newer compounds. Some of the earlier oral cephalosporins, including cefadroxil, cefatrizine and cefroxadine, which are in use in some countries, receive little or no mention.

One point for you. The eight chapters, mainly by authors in continental countries, receive little or no mention. Cefatrizine and cefroxadine, which are in use in some countries, receive little or no mention. According to the publisher's statement 'this book is a valuable source of authoritative information' — and so it is; but at a sterling equivalent price of around £120 for a text of well under 200 pages (with nearly 20% devoted to references), it is scarcely a bargain.

D. GREENWOOD

50 years of Antimicrobials: Past Perspectives and Future Trends


This book is the latest volume in the Society for General Microbiology's Symposium series and the timing of its publication is apt as it coincides with the 50th anniversary of the Society. As suggested by the title, the book covers a large subject area, dealing with antimicrobial agents active against bacteria, viruses, fungi and protozoa. The editors have achieved a good mix of chapters that are informative, include up-to-date references and most of which are easy to read. The organisation of chapters is sometimes a little surprising, with some that address related topics not grouped together. Inevitably, this results in some minor repetition between contributions from different authors.

The book opens with the text of a lecture given by Sir Alexander Fleming in 1946 and this serves as a useful reminder of the state-of-the-art at the time. Other chapters also have a firm historical perspective covering the discovery or synthesis of new classes of antimicrobial agents and subsequent synthetic modifications made to improve their activities. Also included are chapters that tackle the questions 'Why do we still get epidemics?' and 'Why do micro-organisms produce antimicrobials?'. The book presents a number of different perspectives on established topics. For example, the chapter 'Who needs new antimicrobials?' concentrates on the need to develop agents for protozoal diseases in the developing world rather than the more usual need to tackle antibiotic-resistant bacteria in hospitals. However, as pointed out by several of the contributors, the development of new antimicrobial agents is very often profit-driven and those diseases affecting individuals in countries with the ability to pay are attractive targets.

The only real criticism is the inclusion of a chapter on the use of baculoviruses as insecticides for agricultural use. This seemed to be misplaced and out of context with the rest of the book, particularly as any future potential for developing these agents against the arthropod vectors of infectious disease is not discussed.

One point of irritation was the correct use of the new generic names Stenotrophomonas and Burkholderia for bacteria formerly known as Xanthomonas maltophilia and Pseudomonas cepacia, respectively, in a chapter which stated, incorrectly, that the mechanism of glycopeptide resistance in enterococci is 'not known'. Similarly, in another chapter, the phrase 'Enterococcus hirae (formerly Streptococcus faecalis)' might cause confusion. The latter species is now Enterococcus faecalis and is distinct from E. hirae, which did not exist before the inception of the genus Enterococcus.

Overall, this volume should definitely find a place in libraries and will be of interest to anyone working in the general field of antimicrobial agents.

N. WOODFORD

A Practical Guide to Clinical Bacteriology


This book was an enjoyable read as well as a refresher in the basic principles of clinical bacteriology and its application to modern medicine. The level of detail contained in the book suggests that it is aimed primarily at medical and dental undergraduates, junior medical staff, laboratory technicians and students of human biology rather than clinical microbiology trainees studying for MRCPPath. The layout is logical and well structured, beginning with general principles of bacteriology, classification and antimicrobial therapy. Each of the medically important genera is described in turn, in a uniform style of presentation that allows for easy reading. Although, on first impressions, some of the chapters on the more medically prevalent organisms such as staphylococci and streptococci appear brief, a large amount of information on each genus is incorporated, without overloading the reader with clinically irrelevant facts. Each of the generic chapters has a boxed resume on the first page, summarising the salient features of the genus under six subheadings—transmission, clinical features, complications, laboratory diagnosis, therapy and prophylaxis. This allows easy, rapid reference. The tables in chapter 8 discussing clinical syndromes are well laid out, again providing the essential facts and figures. The humorous illustrations are supposed to convey information about the particular aspect of bacteriology under discussion and aim to promote retention of a bacteriological principle or clinical characteristic of an organism group in an amusing manner.

For the breadth of clinical bacteriology that is covered in this book, it is good value for £12.95 and a handy quick reference source for various health-care workers interested in bacteriology.

P. FLANAGAN

Problems in Medical Microbiology


Microbiology and Immunology Casebook


The GMC has recommended that the undergraduate medical curriculum should encourage analytical thinking through problem-based learning methods and both these books claim to be a response to this directive. However, they are as
different in their approach to this educational method as the
two continents from which they come.

Holton et al. use the traditional approach to problem cases. 
Questions are asked relating to cases presented on one page;
answers are provided on another with appropriate references.
The cases are arranged by micro-organism aetiology and there 
is a good balance between the most important infections caused by bacteria, viruses and fungi with a
short section on parasitic infections. This book is well
written, clearly laid out and excellently illustrated.

The approach taken by Barrett is entirely different. The
philosophy, as stated, is to stimulate students to educate
themselves. Laboratory microbiology, infections and clinical
immunology are covered. Each case presentation is followed
by some basic questions. Useful information in tables, and
lists of broadly appropriate information sources are provided.
However, there are no answers or commentaries on the
cases; these are to be developed by the student. Barrett
suggests that the questions provided are merely a start for
student’s learning. For example, a case of viral pneumonia
might ultimately stimulate the student to consider what are
the mechanisms of antigenic drift and shift in the influenza
virus. The style of this book, and the nature of some cases
presented, reflect its American authorship. There are no
illustrations.

There are advantages and disadvantages in the different
approaches of these books. The availability of answers in
Problems in Medical Microbiology does not really encourage
students to learn from asking questions themselves in order
to solve problems, and in this respect it is not entirely
consistent with what educationalists consider ‘problem-based
learning’. However, this approach does make it easy for
students, at all levels, to test their knowledge in a quick,
informative and enjoyable way. I expect it will find most use
as a revision aid. In contrast, Microbiology and Immunology
Casebook is a starting place from which self-education
proceeds. To use it effectively, undergraduates need to be
highly motivated and carefully guided by an experienced
teacher. If used as suggested, learning through use of this
book will be very labour-intensive; a medical undergraduate
might be expected to complete only a few cases. This book
will probably be of more use to postgraduate students and
teachers.

M. GILL

Textbook of Diagnostic Microbiology

Edited by C.R. MAHON and G. MANUSELIA. 1995. ISBN 0-
1134. £29.95.

This textbook aims to provide a comprehensive introduction
to diagnostic microbiology for those entering the field. The
1134 pages are divided into three parts which cover basic
principles, the identification of significant isolates and the
diagnosis of infections. The principles of laboratory safety
and quality control are covered in early chapters together with
concepts and procedures in antimicrobial susceptibility
testing. How colonial morphology is used for the presumptive
identification of organisms is described thoroughly. In
addition to these (and other) traditional basic concepts, the
first part also covers ‘emerging technologies’. These include
commercially available rapid identification kits and auto-
mated systems, chromatography, DNA probes and the
polymerase chain reaction.

The laboratory identification of medically important bacte-
ria, parasites, fungi and viruses is described in part II. As in
part I, each of the 16 chapters in part II is laid out clearly
with objectives, tables, diagrams and excellent photographs.
Part III takes an organ system approach to diagnostic
microbiology with chapters covering infections of the
respiratory tract, skin, gastrointestinal tract, central nervous
system, bloodstream, urinary tract and eye. Chapters are
devoted also to sexually transmitted diseases, infections in
special patient populations and zoonotic and rickettsial
infections. Brief case studies illustrate the course of various
infections.

This American book is surprisingly relevant to diagnostic
microbiology in the United Kingdom and is well illustrated
and easy to read. It covers comprehensively nearly all
aspects of diagnostic microbiology (with the possible
exception of outbreak investigations and hospital infection
control) in an accessible manner and is eminently suitable
for those new to the field, especially trainee medical
laboratory scientific officers.

J.Z. JORDEN