BOOK REVIEWS

Cases in Medical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases, 2nd edition


This is the second edition of a book I reviewed some time ago. Comparing the two editions, this latest is a definite improvement on its predecessor. There are more cases and many more good quality colour illustrations. The authors have especially increased the number of illustrations relating to laboratory procedures and findings, because they recognise that laboratory courses are becoming restricted in their size and scope. The book’s layout has also changed. The new edition’s cases are arranged by system rather than by infecting organism type. The collection of cases for each system is preceded by a brief but informative summary of types of infection and organisms relevant to that system. In addition, there is a table summarising the features of organisms infecting that system. In common with most books of this type, each case description is followed by a number of questions and their answers. There is always a tendency to ‘cheat’ and turn quickly to the answers with this layout. The answers provided are very comprehensive and if the keen student is not satisfied, further references are provided with each case. Being a North American text book, some of the features of the cases have a North American slant and some would be unusual in the UK. However, this does not detract from a good collection of cases. I am never quite sure how useful undergraduates find such books as this. Most of the medical students I have asked would be happy to borrow it from a library to delve into it as light relief from reading conventional textbooks. The price would deter them from buying their own copy.

M. Gill

Tuberculosis Bacteriology: Organisation and Practice, 2nd edition


The second edition of this text appeared last year, after its initial publication in 1985. Our laboratory copy of the first edition had been ‘borrowed’ some years ago, testimony to the affection in which it was held. The three authors write with a single voice, giving us their personal view on the practice of diagnostic mycobacteriology. They attempt to straddle the worlds of the well-equipped, developed-world laboratory and the less well regulated conditions encountered in many of those countries where the prevalence of tuberculosis is greatest. This produces a somewhat uncomfortable style in places and does not provide an exhaustive text for either circumstance. Nonetheless it contains a wealth of information and would be invaluable to anyone running a diagnostic mycobacteriology laboratory.

The opening chapter sets the scene with a brief overview of the history, taxonomy, epidemiology and pathogenesis of tuberculosis, touching also on some other mycobacterial diseases of importance in man.

The next three chapters cover the design, organisation and operation of the laboratory and hence the attempt to juggle the different national and international systems for the classification of pathogenic organisms becomes a little confusing. Some of the procedures, such as laboratory fumigation, are described in enough detail to make the reader aware of many of the problems, but do not attempt to offer a standard operating procedure.

The next five chapters describe laboratory practice, covering the collection of specimens, microscopy, culture, identification, drug susceptibility tests and a description of nucleic acid-based techniques.

These chapters are written entirely from a laboratory perspective with brief clinical information. Many of the observations appear to be based on personal experience and it would be helpful to know whether they are supported by a few more references. Helpful recipes for stains and media are given to support the text in all sections, and the chapters form a most useful core to the book. They also portray the rapidly changing nature of the practice of mycobacteriology, where stains originally designed by Erlich (later modified, of course, by Ziehl and Neelsen) are described alongside nucleic acid-based techniques for rapid detection of Mycobacterium tuberculosis in specimens, for detection of rifampicin resistance, and for epidemiological typing. These latter techniques, with others requiring sophisticated laboratory equipment and management (such as automated liquid culture systems), are described in principle, but with much less detail than conventional techniques. Readers are cautioned, rather sternly, against embracing newer methods without understanding their role fully. This is well said but slightly underplays the promise that the newer techniques offer to deal with the laboratory elements of urgent clinical problems.

The final chapter discusses the laboratory diagnosis of leprosy, a technique in which few UK laboratories now have much experience, but which still has a wide application.

G. Smith

Current Clinical Topics in Infectious Diseases, volume 17


This well-established series occupies a position somewhere between the specialist review journal, and the general specialist textbook. Published annually, the series provides a useful source for those who need to get to grips with a new topic quickly, or who need to update on current thinking and technological advancements. I feel that those interested in infectious diseases and microbiology look forward to dipping into the chapters of each new edition. However, they do not take the place of the specialist journal for continuing, cutting edge, education.

The 17th edition contains 15 chapters, each written by