Diagnostic methods in viral hepatitis


This book is a bound version of one number of the Journal of Medical Virology (vol. 3, no. 1, 1978), and is the proceedings of a symposium held on January 7th, 1978. It is concerned almost totally with hepatitis B. Hepatitis A is mentioned briefly in the opening review by Zuckerman, as is non-A, non-B hepatitis. The rest of the issue is taken up with fairly technical accounts of various aspects of testing for the antigenic components of the hepatitis B virus and antibodies to them. It is inevitable that such a book, made up of 15 papers given at a one-day symposium, is somewhat fragmented and uneven. Nevertheless, taken individually they contain valuable accounts by those actually using the techniques, even though someone purchasing the book from a catalogue might imagine that he is buying a comprehensive account of the subject. This is not a criticism of the authors or of the organisers, but rather of the book as a publishing event. Presumably it could be bought for half the price in its original form. In its present format it is, in fact, a sheep in wolf’s clothing.

A. P. Waterson

Phage-typing of coagulase-negative staphylococci


This report of the 1st International Conference on phage-typing of coagulase-negative staphylococci, held in Cologne in 1977, provides basis data on the bacteriophages currently in use for typing these organisms, the experience of several centres in the application of phage-tying systems to epidemiological problems, and discussion of the need to improve the investigation of serious infections, particularly those affecting prosthetic heart valves. It will appeal not only to phage specialists but to anyone interested in coagulase-negative staphylococci and in implant surgery. The contributions include epidemiological and clinical findings as well as biotyping data. However, the methods of biotyping used by the various authors are not consistent.

The aim of the meeting was to consider the data available and to initiate studies into the feasibility of establishing an “international set” of phages, and the report ends with an “opening statement” setting up an informal working group.

The articles fall loosely into three groups. Firstly, papers from Professor Pulverer’s institute describe the morphology and behaviour of the phages, in relation to the whole of the Micrococcaceae; phage absorption may be a useful taxonomic technique in this family. Secondly, papers from several laboratories describe the usefulness of their respective phage-sets for typing local strains of staphylococci, and there are some suggestions opposing the value of an international set. The technique of “reverse typing”, i.e., determining the host-range of phages carried by field strains, is also described. Lastly, there are papers in which phage typing is described as a method of elucidating epidemiological and clinical problems.

The importance of coagulase-negative staphylococci, especially Staphylococcus epidermidis biotype 1, in patients with prosthetic valve implants is reiterated in several articles. However, in serious infections biotyping tends to be of value only rarely. Antibiotic susceptibility of the staphylococci is dealt with by several groups of workers, and the frequency of resistance in clinical situations is emphasised. As several papers indicate, an individual can carry up to seven phage-distinguishable strains on his skin, which makes for difficulty in epidemiological investigations.

R. R. Marples

Antimicrobial prophylaxis in surgery


I have no doubt that this unique book should be essential reading for all microbiologists and
surgeons, because it covers an area of great clinical importance and much recent development, which has never previously been summarised in such a concise, well-documented book. Dogma has bedevilled the use of prophylactic antibiotics even more than most aspects of surgery. The fervour with which current fashions are held by many is equalled only by the rapidity with which they are replaced. Opinions that would have produced instant failure in qualifying examinations ten years ago are considered wise, up-to-date treatment today. The clear, concise presentation of the results of objective trials, which is one of the best features of this book, is therefore most welcome. Unfortunately it becomes only too apparent on reading the evidence that it is still insufficient to be certain what is the best practice in particular circumstances. Although the theme of the book is the development of rational policy for chemoprophylaxis in surgery, in most areas we still lack the basic experimental information to achieve this aim.

This book is the result of the practical collaboration between a microbiologist and a surgeon. After the first 60 pages of general introduction, individual chapters are devoted to specific problems relating to all the surgical specialties. The concise and clear text is supplemented by particularly excellent tables of the collected results of investigations from which it is possible to draw one's own conclusions.

The nature of the basic problem in the prevention of operative infection was clearly defined by Pasteur's: "all things are hidden, obscure and debatable if the cause of the phenomena be unknown, but everything is clear if this cause be known". Thanks to Pasteur and Lister, we now know that infection is usually caused by bacteria, but we are still largely ignorant why one patient develops a postoperative infection whilst another does not. As usual in such circumstances, we take recourse to postulating a multifactorial aetiology. The resulting confusion is not helped by statements such as this one, often repeated in this book, that the incidence of infection is greatly increased if a drain is used. Surely it is just as likely that a drain is inserted when, for various reasons, the surgeon fears infection.

Perhaps the most important message that comes out of this book is that we should all monitor and carefully audit our peri-operative infection rate. The data presented will encourage us to question many of the myths relating to peri-operative infection, for instance the increased risk of infection in malnourished patients or in well controlled diabetics, neither of which has been supported by objective evidence. It is perhaps unfortunate that the authors are occasionally themselves slightly uncritically overenthusiastic. For instance, it was only 15 years ago that Brannett and Cole first advocated a short peri-operative course of antibiotics and it is only in the last year that a single intravenous dose has been described as possibly equally adequate; nevertheless the authors suggest that this is now definitely the recommended treatment. Finally, my only very minor quibble with this otherwise excellent book is that it seems slightly ungracious to write a book on infection in surgery, with several hundreds of references, without once mentioning Semmelweiss.

J. A. DORMANDY

Candida and candidosis

Since the publication of the classical monograph on *Candida albicans* by H. I. Winner and Rosalinde Hurley in 1964, the literature on *Candida* and candidosis has become so voluminous that this review by F. C. Odds must be welcomed as timely and apposite. Medical microbiologists and libraries possessing a copy of "Winner and Hurley" are well advised to purchase "Candida and candidosis" as a valuable up-to-date supplement.

In his preface Dr Odds states that "some 200 to 300 papers on candidosis appear annually in the world scientific and medical literature". The volume lists 2265 references and because many were published before "Winner and Hurley" these are significantly fewer than might be expected. Clearly, Dr Odds has adopted a policy of omission for some of those articles on *Candida* which once published are seldom consulted again.

There are chapters on biological aspects of yeast pathogens, on structure, physiology and biochemistry of *Candida*, on morphogenesis, laboratory identification, ecology and epidemi-