

Book Review

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Clinical Tuberculosis, third edition. Edited by Peter D. O. Davies. London: Arnold, 2003. Pp. 476. ISBN 0-340-80916-7.

This is the much-revised third edition of an established reference book on tuberculosis, popular particularly in Commonwealth countries. At 476 pages, the book is slimmer than the previous edition published only five years ago, but still remains comprehensive. The concept of 'clinical tuberculosis' is interpreted widely to include the relevant science, epidemiology and politics that underpin good practice in the diagnosis, management and prevention of TB.

The book is composed of 28 chapters arranged into nine parts. There are contributions from a total of 37 authors, many of whom are international authorities in their field. But that is not to say that their contributions are of a uniformly high standard. While the majority of chapters are very well written, up to date and relevant, there are a few that are clearly below par.

In the former category, there are excellent and concise chapters covering histopathology, immunophysiology and immunopathology, clinical aspects of respiratory tuberculosis, non-respiratory tuberculosis, tuberculosis in childhood, chemotherapy of tuberculosis, surgery of tuberculosis and treatment of latent tuberculosis. There are also many other topics which are competently dealt with as individual chapters: clinical pharmacology of anti-tuberculosis drugs, DOTS and DOTS-plus, association between HIV and tuberculosis in industrialized countries, association between HIV and tuberculosis in developing countries, tuberculosis and migration, interpretation of the tuberculin skin test, BCG vaccination and control of TB in low-prevalence

countries. The chapter on patient holding has useful lessons for practitioners in both high-prevalence and low-prevalence countries.

There are a few chapters which, while providing useful information, tend to stray into the irrelevant or are not fully up to date. In this category, I would include the chapters on the history of tuberculosis, epidemiology, laboratory diagnosis, the use of DNA fingerprinting, environmental mycobacteria and tuberculosis in animals. There are three chapters that deal with TB control in high-prevalence countries and specifically with problems in India and in Africa. These chapters, perhaps inevitably, are redolent with the jargon and flow diagrams favoured by international agencies and are in part polemical and repetitive. Busy clinical practitioners dealing with TB patients in the clinic or the community may not find these chapters immediately relevant.

Each chapter contains a useful summary in the form of 'learning points'. The book is amply illustrated with radiographs, diagrams and charts, all of which are relevant and well reproduced. With a few exceptions, the references at the end of each chapter are well chosen and up to date. The index is adequate and accurate and manages to avoid the excessive comprehensiveness of computer-generated indexing.

Allowing for a degree of unevenness that is inevitable in a multi-authored reference work, particularly when the subject is one that is advancing at a rapid pace, this book does a very good job of presenting up-to-date information and opinion on all the main aspects of clinical tuberculosis. In the main, this is done in a concise and readable manner. It is essential reading and a handy reference work for all health-care professionals interested in tuberculosis.

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