BOOK REVIEWS


Recently there has been a considerable revival of interest in phonocardiography, partly owing to the contribution of this technique to the study of haemodynamics and perhaps even more because it has increased the value of clinical auscultation. This book is intended as an introduction to the potentialities and use of the technique for practitioners and students. It fulfils this function admirably. The initial chapters give a clear account of the physical requirements for sound recording and of the production of cardiovascular sounds and murmurs. This is followed by an analysis of phonocardiographic patterns in heart disease, and of the effect of drugs and other agents which alter the phonocardiogram. A useful selected bibliography is appended. Unfortunately (apart from a few sample records) the illustrations are line drawings, and, although this simplifies and clarifies the presentation, it is a disadvantage in learning interpretation of actual records.

The writing is lucid, the opinions expressed are well balanced, and due consideration is given to conflicting opinions. It is a good introduction to the subject and to be recommended to all those interested in this field.

A. MORGAN JONES


This small book is based on lectures given to medical students and postgraduates. Since the original edition in 1958 chapters have been added on electrocardiography by the author, on cardiac catheterization by Dr. David Verel, and on angiocardiography by Dr. Ronald Grainger. The aim is to bridge the gap between specialist textbooks and the descriptions of heart disease to be found in textbooks of internal medicine.

The approach to the subject is traditional and has not been modified by the inclusion of the excellent new chapters on the elements of cardiac catheterization and angiocardiography, which seem to stand apart from the rest of the book. The description of angiocardiography is concerned with much more than the technique, and it overlaps, from a different point of view, the chapter on congenital heart disease. In the major part of the book it is sometimes hard to accept the tenacity with which tradition dominates the opinions expressed: the section on heart disease in pregnancy asserts that congestive heart failure is 'the most frequent cause of death' in pregnant women with mitral stenosis, and pulmonary oedema (which has been shown to cause more deaths in pregnancy) receives relatively little comment. In discussing ischaemic heart disease it is stated that 'it is now usual to equate coronary sclerosis (atheroma) with angina pectoris, and coronary thrombosis with myocardial infarction . . .' although it is widely recognized that the sudden onset of angina pectoris may be the only symptom of coronary occlusion with myocardial infarction. It is strange to find expressions reminiscent of popular medicine such as 'a pukka coronary thrombosis' and (as a chapter heading) 'When is a murmur not a murmur?'

The book is short and easy to read; it is admirably produced and has many excellent illustrations, particularly in the section on angiocardiography.

A. MORGAN JONES


The third edition of this attractive little book has been entirely recast and brought up to date. It retains its value in giving an insight into the attitudes and practice concerning the use of benzene and its homologues in France. It is divided like Gaul into three parts; first, a general description of the chemistry of benzene and its homologues (described as 'benzols'); secondly, a discussion of the toxicology of this group of substances, including the medical criteria used in the diagnosis and evaluation of cases and information on compensation of benzene poisoning illustrated with some figures from recent years; thirdly, a section on the control of the hazard including detection, ventilation, labelling, and the use of substitutes. Each section has a list of supplementary reading.

The features which strike the British reader are:—

(1) The detailed nature of the French legislation on the subject (26 texts are mentioned), including as it does directions to the physician on the haematological criteria for fitness, extensive prohibitions on the use of benzene, elaborate compensation provisions referring to the processes in which benzene is used and the disorders to which it gives rise, and specific instructions about red, green or yellow labels according to the benzene content of the material.

(2) That for all this elaborate legislation the number of cases were 92 in 1960 (nine fatal), 103 in 1961 (five fatal), and 95 in 1962 (10 fatal). Our figures for the corresponding years were nil, nil, and four (one fatal).

Either we are lucky, or farsighted, or our criteria for benzene poisoning are different from those of the French.

(3) There appears to be a wide use of benzol in spite of the prohibitions in a variety of industries where it is not used in this country—dry cleaning for example—reminding us that when dry cleaning (or French cleaning as it was originally called) was introduced into this country, the solvent was benzene.

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(4) The curious ideas about ventilation per descensum unless the solvent is warmed when per ascensum is also admitted. Some work on the relative concentrations of benzene vapour at different levels above the floor would indicate whether this doubtful thesis is tenable. This may account for what is described as a veritable scourge of cases.

(5) The lack of references to any work on the subject outside France, Germany and Italy. Of 79 references only three are outside these countries. This apparent chauvinism, however, does not detract from the interest and value of the book.

Robert Murray


The first edition, published seven years ago, was praised for its imaginative approach but criticized for its brevity; in parts there was not quite enough fleson the bones of the ideas. This edition, nearly three times the length of its predecessor at just over twice the cost, gives a much fuller account of epidemiological methods and their application. The ideas with several additions are well illustrated with old and new epidemiological enquiries.

Seven uses of epidemiology are outlined. Study of the History of the Health of Populations (I) and Diagnosis of the Health of the Community (II) are obvious essentials to any health service—national, local or occupational—since they show how diseases change their incidence and measure the present dimensions and distribution of health and disease. But how many communities have usable, comprehensive inventories of their recognized chronic physical disease problems and of the needs for community care and rehabilitation? ‘There has been far too little spill-over from traditional public health with its long experience of tuberculosis and rheumatic heart disease registries.’ ‘National Insurance has a potentially fabulous store of information and far greater effort should be devoted to realizing it.’

Study of the Working of Health Services (III) to know how they are really working with a view to their improvement, as distinct from laws, plans and pronouncements about them, is likely to be an unpopular field of enquiry. This is perhaps why so little has been done by the health services and, to our academic shame, why the contribution from the universities has been so meagre. To show, for example, that case fatality rates for ischaemic heart disease, hernia with obstruction, appendicitis with peritonitis, and prostatic hyperplasia are significantly higher in non-teaching than in teaching hospitals is the kind of unpleasant social fact that, by almost universal agreement, is best swept under the carpet. But still those responsible for health services should endeavour to find the causes of such disparities.

To Estimate Individual Risk from Group Experience (IV) is a classical use of epidemiology but its application to the problems of the day, and expressed in terms that can be generally understood, has a real potential in preventive medicine. For the heavy smoker to know and to be reminded continually that he is 20 times more likely to die of lung cancer than the non-smoker has already had a profound effect on the smoking habits of doctors, with no doubt the added stimulus of their clinical experience of lung cancer and the need to set an example. As more and more forward-looking studies of the chronic diseases are developed, more and more people will want to know the answers to such questions as—What are the chances of the athletic, non-smoking Jack Spratt having ischaemic heart disease in his fifties or sixties? Is self-denial worth while?

Completing the Clinical Picture of Disease (V) and Identifying Syndromes (VI) are obviously inter-related. The more complete the clinical picture the more it will be possible to describe epidemiological patterns with enough confidence to identify syndromes. These uses are well illustrated with examples from the author’s own work on atherosclerosis, ischaemic heart disease, and cerebral vascular disease.

The longest and the most important chapter, entitled In Search of Causes (VII), contains an attractive mixture of theory and practice. There is a good discussion of multiple causes of disease, emphasizing that the concept of host and environmental causes is too simple because of the importance of personal habits and behaviour which derive from both. The discussions of the causes of ischaemic heart disease, essential hypertension, bronchitis, and the ecology of mental disorders will be of general interest to any doctor, if only to emphasize his ignorance and to challenge us to find some of the answers.

This book is written for students of both clinical and preventive medicine, which means everyone in or associated with medicine who is interested in measuring the amount and severity of disease in a population. It has a special value to teachers because of its many excellent examples, and to the occupational physician who has such unique opportunities for studying health and disease in populations. Not surprisingly, there is an abundance of examples of studies in occupational medicine, demonstrating uses of the epidemiological method.

Anyone short of ideas for research should read this book without skipping the meaty little footnotes, and taking note of the ample bibliography. R. S. F. Schilling