Human Virology: A Text for Students of Medicine, Dentistry and Microbiology, 2nd edn

The first edition of Human Virology was intended to provide an accessible source of basic information in a form suitable both for students and practitioners of medicine and dentistry. Since it appeared in 1993 the success of its purpose has been amply demonstrated by its popularity, whilst at the same time the last 7 years have witnessed unusual progress in all aspects of virology. The authors are therefore fully justified in now preparing a revised and updated second edition of the book.

As with the first edition, the text is arranged in four main sections covering: General principles, Specific virus infections, Special syndromes and Practical aspects. Abundant well-designed tables and diagrams illustrate each well-explained topic, and two welcome new features have been introduced: more detailed accounts of the molecular biology of viral genomes and their replication, helpfully set in italics for those who wish to skip such complicated matters, and a great expansion of the coverage of herpesviruses and hepatitis viruses. The up-dating of the work is exemplified by the inclusion of material on such recently discovered agents as Kaposi’s sarcoma herpesvirus and by the extended account now given of prion diseases. Each chapter ends with a convenient list of summary points to be remembered under the heading ‘Reminders’.

Overall, the present volume is a commendable survey of a complicated subject which will certainly be useful for students following traditional curricula and therefore having a thorough grounding in biochemistry and some knowledge of clinical terms by the time they come to study viruses. However, for students on the new curricula, gradually required in all UK medical schools by the GMC, where subjects are dealt with in longitudinal systems teaching extending right through the course, there may be problems; not enough biochemistry will be known immediately after A-levels and much of the clinical terminology will be obscure.

Perhaps for the next edition the authors will recast the presentation to meet the changed circumstances. It is also to be hoped that the various production errors will be eliminated in reprints of the present edition, e.g. Figures 7.4 and 7.5 each designate two quite different sets of pictures, measles vaccine does not show ‘liability’ but lability, Figure 8.1 is exactly the same as Figure 2.3, VPg is not explained under Table 11.1 or in the useful list of abbreviations, etc. More seriously, it is hoped that the rare factual errors will be corrected: the People’s Republic of China does not contain half the world’s population; Rous did not discover his classic oncogenic virus in 1910 but in 1911; much less than 50% of those infected with herpes simplex virus experience recurrent symptoms.

Despite these minor blemishes the authors have once again provided an excellent basic overview of all aspects of medical virology which can be strongly recommended to anyone seeking a balanced and well-informed introduction to the topic.

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