Reviews of Books


There are good reasons for including the musculoskeletal system and its afflications in the core curriculum for undergraduate training. Musculoskeletal pain and disability are common and many facets of rheumatic conditions require skills and attitudes that are pertinent to medicine and patient care in general. The major emphasis of an undergraduate course should be on appropriate and accurate patient assessment, and teaching should focus on history and examination skills and clinical competencies related to common or urgent locomotor conditions.

Musculoskeletal Medicine and Surgery is principally intended for undergraduate medical students. The authors, a professor and a senior lecturer in orthopaedics and a senior lecturer in rheumatology, set out to provide an integrated textbook covering what they perceive as the core curriculum of musculoskeletal disease and injury. The book spans the traditional territories of both rheumatology and orthopaedics. The authors point out that at the undergraduate level many of the fundamental divisions between rheumatology and orthopaedics are false or at least unhelpful. The book has an emphasis towards problem-based, system-orientated teaching.

Many universities now teach rheumatology and orthopaedics together; its advantage as opposed to teaching rheumatology with medicine and orthopaedics with surgery is that students have the opportunity to concentrate on the musculoskeletal system, learning how to assess problems (with the emphasis on history-taking and examination techniques) and how different disease processes and injuries adversely affect the integrity of this system. The authors hope that the textbook will achieve three objectives: first, to develop good history-taking and examination skills relevant to the patient; secondly, to understand and know about the common and important musculoskeletal conditions; thirdly, to give insight into the challenges of musculoskeletal disease and injury and into how much is achievable.

Most chapters begin with a case history, and some chapters include more than one case history. When chapters deal with several different conditions linked by a common theme, there are also shorter ‘scenarios’ to emphasize clinical points. After the case history there is a box highlighting the key points and emphasizing essential knowledge. Where appropriate, there are sections on epidemiology, pathology, history and examination, and an approach to investigation and treatment. The authors point out that although much basic scientific and clinical research is currently under way, this is only occasionally referred to in the book, as it was felt to be outside the remit of the core curriculum.

There are omissions. For example, although COX-2 inhibitors are mentioned there is no mention of the new DMARD leflunomide. The new TNF-α blockers are covered in the sentence ‘new therapies are directed against cytokines’. However, this is a book for the undergraduate and I consider the essential information has been included and the balance is correct. The authors hope that interested students will obtain more detailed descriptions elsewhere. I strongly recommend this excellent book both to medical students and to their teachers.

B. Hazleman


In this book several authors have contributed many chapters which are unique to the care of patients with rheumatological conditions. A similar book—Combined Care of the Rheumatic Patient by Bird, le Gallez and Hill, (1985), which covered similar topics—is out of print. The publication of the present volume is timely and provides an excellent overview of the care of patients with rheumatological conditions. Understanding the care of patients with rheumatological conditions has been found to promote positive outcomes. The authors aimed to provide a practical guide for nurses and allied health-care professionals, and they have accomplished this with the different topics covered. There is much in the book that will be helpful to this group of health professionals. This book is concise and well written; it forms a useful guide that one can refer to as required with the expectation of getting an answer to your questions. As a clinical nurse specialist in rheumatology, I found the book easy to use, and it serves as a useful reference guide.

Most chapters provide reference lists that could prove useful for those who intend to read widely about the topics covered. The book also covers topics that patients may find interesting and useful. The writing style is very clear and comprehensive. The layout and the use of headings and subheadings, illustrations and a comprehensive index add easy reading and reference. This book is recommended for nurses and others involved in caring for patients with rheumatological conditions. It should be acquired for every rheumatology ward, outpatient and nursing library as it provides an outstanding guide to the care of patients with rheumatological conditions. It more than justifies its price.

A. Olalaye
This little book provides a succinct review of the biology of cytokines and their involvement in the inflammatory process, with particular reference to rheumatoid arthritis. It then leads on to the role of tumour necrosis factor (TNF) inhibition in rheumatoid arthritis, with a summary of the clinical trials. The field is moving fast and I can see that a little book like this neatly fills the gap between heavyweight basic science, published in journals which are rarely consulted by practising clinicians, and the annual review articles appearing either in specialist review journals or the occasional articles in specialised journals.

The major contributions of Professors Maini and Feldman are well known to rheumatologists. This publication will be useful for those clinicians who from now on need to know as much, or probably more, about cytokines as they do about endocrine hormones, for example. It is truly a pocket reference measuring 11 × 17 cm, about the size of a pocket diary. It will probably need bringing up to date from time to time, but there is probably nothing anything like as good or as easily assimilable. The illustrations are clear and the additional references for further reading are also useful.

It might be said that this booklet represents the specific group viewpoint of two of the principal workers in this field, but, on the other hand, all publications have a bias of some sort. With the slowly increasing number of reports of adverse affects of the TNF inhibitors, it is particularly relevant to be able to understand the current views on the clinical biology and possible risks of these new agents.

The first half of the 50-page book is devoted to the role of cytokines in inflammation. The next few pages review current therapies and the final 15 pages or so cover the role of TNF-α antagonism in the management of rheumatoid arthritis. It would be spurious to point to omissions in such a rigorously diminutive booklet. Such additional considerations relevant to this new field of biological therapies might include cost benefit, potential long term toxicity and reviews of the other emerging therapies, including interleukin 1 receptor antagonists. However, this booklet certainly does represent a useful addition to one’s shelf or pocket.

M. L. Snaith