Congenital and Perinatal Infections: A Concise Guide to Diagnosis
Edited by Cecelia Hutto

Totowa, N.J.: Humana Press, 2006. 314 pp. $119.00 (cloth).

Congenital and Perinatal Infections: A Concise Guide to Diagnosis is conceptually a veritable breath of fresh air. In an age of textbook logorrhea, the aim to provide “a concise clinical reference that facilitates the diagnosis of [congenital] infections” (pg. ix) is noteworthy in and of itself. In a span of ~300 pages and 26 chapters, this multi-authored volume provides initial, general principles of laboratory diagnosis of bacterial, viral, and parasitic infections, as well as subsequent discussions of specific perinatal infections and their diagnoses.

The breadth of infections is wide, ranging from infections due to the more frequently recognized herpes viruses, parvovirus B19, and group B streptococci to those due to Toxoplasma gondii and the emerging fatal, teratogenic pathogen lymphocytic choriomeningitis virus (LCMV). Because the text is multi-authored, the writing is somewhat uneven, and the references are variable, although generally up-to-date. Most of the infection-specific chapters have an initial, succinct clinical summary followed by laboratory diagnostic assays and their interpretation. Thus, this book is hardly a handbook of laboratory diagnosis, but rather a combination of clinical and laboratory distinguishing features of infections in pregnant women, their fetuses, and newly born infants.

For whom is this volume intended? The editor states that it “will be useful to all clinicians” (p. ix) who provide perinatal care. Although the first chapter devoted to serologic diagnosis is an up-to-date overview with interesting and sometimes opposing viewpoints presented, it probably has more infectious disease detail than either the practicing neonatologist or obstetrician will use. In contrast, the next chapter, which is devoted to culture and identification of pathogens, is a bit too elementary, including specimen-labeling instructions. The chapter on diagnosis of viral infections is excellent, well written, and pragmatic; it would have benefited from inclusion of a table listing the preferred diagnostic modality for each virus.

The authors, many of whom are recognized investigators of the specific pathogens of which they write, generally present current information. The chapter on herpes simplex virus, for instance, is an excellent exposition whose references, however, do not measure up to the text. Similarly, the chapter on cytomegalovirus is a good, current summary of the field, although there is some surprising repetition in clinical description. The chapter on varicella-zoster virus is a gem written by the “expert.” Of interest, the editor’s chapters on rubella and group B streptococcal infections are among the most succinct. A superb section that stands out because of the relative brevity of clinical description and focus on the complexities of microbiologic diagnosis is that devoted to T. gondii. The syphilis chapter contains an excellent algorithm for evaluation and treatment of neonates in whom this infection is suspected. The photographs, however, are of fair quality and do not add to the information presented. Redundant discussion of the clinical spectrum of the acquired LCMV infection detracts somewhat from this chapter, as does the omission of LCMV-associated nonimmune hydrops in the fetus. Recognition of the almost invariably fatal course of acquired LCMV infection in transplant recipients undoubtedly occurred while this book was in press, and thus, it too is not mentioned.

The index of this volume is surprisingly inadequate, generally referring the reader only to the specific chapter devoted to the pathogen, with unfortunate neglect of the initial chapters, which are devoted to general diagnostic principles. Strengthening of this important section will also augment the usefulness of this text.

The almost-simultaneously published 6th edition of Remington and Klein’s tome on congenital infections (Infectious Diseases of the Fetus and Newborn Infant) will remain the definitive text to which clinicians refer when faced with a diagnostic or therapeutic infectious disease conundrum in a neonate. Hutto’s slim volume, however, will serve as she intended, as an initial, “concise guide” for seasoned clinicians, as well as for those in training.

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Infectious Diseases of the Fetus and Newborn Infant, 6th Edition
Edited by Jack S. Remington, Jerome O. Klein, Christopher B. Wilson, and Carol J. Baker

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Now in its 6th (30th anniversary) edition, Infectious Diseases of the Fetus and Newborn Infant remains the definitive textbook in this field and an indispensable resource for anyone caring for women, fetuses, and newborn infants. For the current edition, the existing chapters have been regrouped into 5 sections: “General Information,” “Bacterial Infections,” “Viral Infections,” “Protozoan, Helminth, and Fungal Infections,” and “Diagnosis and Management.” This rearrangement improves on the more-disjointed layout of the 5th edition. Although many previous authors remain, several new experts have contributed to this edition. Perhaps most importantly, Christopher Wilson and Carol Baker have joined Jack Remington and Jerome Klein as editors (I suspect both...