Oral Biology at the Turn of the Century
B. Guggenheim and S. Shapiro, Eds.
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This book is a compendium of articles (28 in total) that summarize papers presented at the European Research Group for Oral Biology (ERGOB) Conference held at Interlaken in August 1998. Each article is between six and ten pages in length and the book totals 295 pages, including 30 pages of Panel Discussions at the end.

A broad range of topics related to oral biology is covered across six sections. The first section, which is the shortest, deals with epidemiological data on prevalence, incidence and risk factors in oral (microbial) diseases. The second section contains a mixture of short reviews on oral biofilms, caries and periodontal disease. It is these articles that would be most useful to students in the later stages of their undergraduate dental course. Section 3 on orofacial patterning and regeneration contains seven papers. Two of these are particularly informative and detailed reviews on Hedgehog proteins in craniofacial morphogenesis (Hu and Helms) and odontogenic patterning (Sharpe). The remaining sections of the book are entitled Host-Microbial Interactions in the Oral Cavity, Saliva in Health and Disease, and The Future.

While all of the articles are written by renowned experts in their fields, there do seem to be a number of factual errors. As in a multi-author work of this kind, there is considerable variation in depth, detail and style of presentation of individual articles. Inevitably, then, although the editors have tried to provide some continuity, the book is a collection of short stories. Some of the stories are very compelling, while others are less so and almost encourage the reader to skip through pages of text that, without diagrams, do not hold attention. It is difficult to determine to whom this book is directed. While it is clearly a valuable record of this specialist meeting, the work would probably be daunting for most dental undergraduate students and of little interest to clinicians who were not directly involved in the fields of oral biology or craniofacial development. It could, however, be a good value addition to the shelves of academics to assist their teaching. The book would also be useful to oral and dental science researchers requiring an update of research over a broad spectrum of oral biology. Many potential readers might not be enamoured with the 25 or so pages of text devoted to recording the polite discussions of the Conference attendees. These are likely to be of most interest to those who were present at the meeting and remind them of what they purportedly said. Personal highlights of the book are, for me, articles on Oral Tolerance by Czerkinsky, Structure and Function of Histatins by Lendenmann and Oppenheim and Future Strategies to Control Oral Infections by Russell.

I found the last two sections disappointing, and some of the articles showed a little too much self-indulgence by the authors. Omissions for me included: no single paper on the anti-caries and anti-bacterial effects of fluoride (although aspects of this subject are covered in some of the articles); nothing on the virulence and host-signalling properties of periodontal invasive bacteria; and no mention of the structure, properties and functions of the salivary proline-rich protein family.

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