Clark does raise the question of the role of differences in fertility rates by class, and their possible long-term impact on growth. The argument could have been helped if we knew exactly what these offspring did, whether they became major contributors to economic development and also whether this fertility pattern was new at this time, and, if so, why.

While I am somewhat sceptical about several claims, some parts of the numerous pieces of data presented by Clark will stimulate some readers. The use of data on heights to argue about long-term differences (or lack of same) in living standards, the examination of the social consequences of economic growth, and the study of the importance of appropriate labour discipline in permitting economic development, whenever they may have begun, even when capital and entrepreneurship are allowed for, are important questions and these are quite well laid out by Clark. In short, this is a book many will enjoy reading, even with a frequent raising of eyebrows.

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doi:10.1093/ije/dyn074
Advance Access publication 3 May 2008


So any book review should consider whether the tome is accurate, up-to-date and clearly written, with appropriate coverage by writers who know their stuff. Here they should be dealing with the epidemiological ‘Who? What? Why? When? Where?’, as the back cover asserts. There is consideration of gastrointestinal and hepatic disease epidemiology in 35 chapters where the first 16 are devoted to general matters including public health and methodological issues, and the remainder to specific disease groups. The text is clear, logical and contemporaneous. The editors describe the authors as recruited from around the world, although 37 of the 46 were United States-based and 20 of these came from the Mayo Clinic. Nothing wrong with that, but as a result there is a distinct US accent, for instance, but not only in, the chapter on career development, and that on chapter on funding opportunities at the National Institutes of Health. Is the latter needed anyway, it must go rapidly out-of-date and the web must be a better starting point. All the illustrations of hepatitis B incidence and prevalence change from the United States, although this is a world-wide disease with enormous impact in the tropics. The chapter on large databases for epidemiologic studies is similarly long on US sources and short on others, with a notable paucity of possible non-North American sources in the references. One, therefore, has the feeling that the source is/was a Mayo Clinic epidemiology course.

All that said, the text is well-marshalled and thoughtful with clear subheadings supplemented by a well-constructed index, and the authors have maintained a good, mainstream standard, to a consistent and helpful programmatic pattern.

Inevitably there are areas that one might argue about. The referencing, again mainly US in source, seems to be to a median of some two dozen per chapter. This can lead to scanty coverage, such as one only to diet and lifestyle in colorectal cancer. The inclusion of a chapter on clinical trials seems odd. The methods of trials are usually focussed on examining the importance of a possible or actual therapeutic agent upon disease behaviour, with randomization as the tool for excluding the influence of other known or unknown variables. Epidemiologic methods have been a means of bringing possible new treatment modalities into view, but not for their definition, unless trials are impractical. Elsewhere there are good chapters on gall stones, faecal incontinence and non-alcoholic fatty liver. The possible role of diet in gastric cancer causation is thoughtfully discussed, but the possible role of the intraluminal flora in colorectal cancer is not mentioned, whilst consideration of polyp prevention could have been more detailed. The section on peptic ulcer explores well the secular trends in disease frequency, but links poorly into the discussion of drugs inhibiting prostaglandins two chapters on. Protozoal diarrhoeas are little considered, amoebiasis deserves more emphasis, and *Clostridium difficile* acquisition in health care facilities needs coverage.

Gastrointestinal epidemiology, is seldom discussed adequately in general gastrointestinal texts, and this book is soundly put together and makes a good starting point. If a second edition is produced then thought should be given to enlarging its North American focus, some of the chapters could do with less skeletal referencing of focal areas and tropical disease could do with enhanced coverage.

As Dr Sandler’s foreword reminds this reviewer, what is ‘comprehensive, readable and authoritative’ and a ‘landmark’ can or will become ‘quaint’ with the passage of time. It is the fate of most scientific writing, to pass, if we are lucky, from fresh and interesting to embedded, but perhaps démodé in style. Would I recommend this book? Yes, it serves well as an introductory text, currently of course.

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doi:10.1093/ije/dyn137
Advance Access publication 26 June 2008