Book Review

William B. Pratt, Robert Fekety The Antimicrobial Drugs

This is a textbook on the postgraduate level with both basic microbiological data, toxicity, pharmacokinetics and the clinical aspects of antimicrobial drugs. It covers the whole spectrum of infections caused by bacteria, fungi, protozoa, viruses, and helminths. The chapters are detailed, each with citation of a large number of original references. This makes the contents up to date, but the presentation is well organized and still easy to follow. Besides covering therapeutic aspects, the use of antimicrobials for the sake of prophylaxis is also discussed. There is a chapter on choice of antibiotics in out-patient office practice; this gives what appears generally to be sound advice in cases like streptococcal pharyngitis, avoidance of glomerulonephritis and rheumatic fever, otitis media, upper and lower respiratory tract infections, and so on. The advice on sexually transmitted diseases mentions a recent advance like cefotaxime, but has not managed to include the very recent favourable experiences of an alternative like ceftriaxone. In the case of beta-lactamase-producing gono-cocci (referred to by the more old-fashioned term ‘penicillin-resistant’), ‘spectinomycin or cephalosporin regiments’ are advised without mention of erythromycin, tetracyclines or even the favourable results of the fluorinated quinolones. The usefulness of these quinolones would probably have been mentioned if the manuscript had been finished today. Indeed, fluorinated quinolones like ciprofloxacin or norfloxacin would be high on the list for the treatment of bacterial diarrhoeas, where the book advocates prophylaxis with primary alternatives like bismuth subsalicylate and doxycycline, which are both controversial strategies today. But it is difficult to fully include the number of most recent advances in the field of rapid development or to avoid alternatives that could not be argued, in cases where several good strategies are available. Arguable are also the use of oxacillin or nafcillin for beta-lactamase-producing Staphylococcus aureus instead of cloxacillin or flucloxacillin. The superb effect of metronidazole in infections caused by anaerobic bacteria has not been given quite the scope it deserves. Other nitroimidazoles like tinidazole are not mentioned as alternatives in infections caused by anaerobic bacteria. Tinidazole is only mentioned under protozoal disease and a substance like seclidazole, with its more convenient dosage schedule because of longer half-life and same antimicrobial spectrum, is not mentioned at all. Recent advances like the ureidopenicillins or the ampicillin prodrugs like bacampicil-lin, which by now are well established, have clearly been presented.

As drugs against Pseudomonas aeruginosa, the next edition of the book would probably not spend as much space on carbenicillin, but emphasize azlo-cillin, ceftazidime or fluorinated quinolones like ciprofloxacin and norfloxacin; only azlocillin is mentioned in the book among newer antipseudomonas drugs.

As a matter of preference, it would have been useful in a textbook of this nature if one had presented the reasons why it is important with a guided antibiotic policy making, to prevent the emergence of resistant bacterial strains, e.g. within closed nosocomial environments like
hospitals. What strategies should be followed if the frequency of infections caused by polyresistant strains rise? What ground rules exist between the use of a few drugs as opposed to alternate use of active drugs of different clinical entities? How about measures of hospital hygiene in this context?

Thus, although the book is well written and has useful information, it has been difficult for the authors, because of the considerable turmoil and advances within this field of expertise, and the length of time necessarily involved from when a manuscript is finished till the product can appear on the market, for the book to be fully up to date at this time. But the principal foundations are contained within the book, which has a lot of merit. It is suggested that it be more fully revised in the next edition of this book, which is the follow-up of editions appearing in 1973 and 1977.

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