Book Reviews

R.M. Wynn: Obstetrics and Gynecology: the Clinical Core. Lea & Febiger, Philadelphia 1974. The curriculum committees in many medical schools have almost annihilated the time allocated to the teaching of obstetrics and gynecology. Consequently, many attempts have been made to define what knowledge should be acquired by the student in order to be minimally proficient in this branch of medicine. This volume is yet a further endeavour to answer this moot problem. There is, however, one difference and that is it is a book that has avoided the error of being too detailed and expansive for students introduced for the first time to obstetrics and gynecology. In his preface, the author states that a good textbook is possibly the fastest means of transmitting a large volume of knowledge. With this principle in mind, he has designed an excellent book. It is a concise text and, at the same time, is surprisingly comprehensive for its size. Naturally, any reviewer can take issue with specific topics which have been discussed in a dogmatic manner. One point in question is why in the table concerning gynecologic and obstetric history, has the author decided to place the social history and family history at the end. In fact, in the historical analysis of a patient’s history, he has surely put the cart before the horse. In the first portion of the book where he describes the anatomy, surely a line drawing would help the student concerning pelvic anatomy. Some sections are too precise and so many terms are used with little explanation that it can be very confusing to the undergraduate. In his next edition the author should contemplate appending a glossary which could readily circumvent this criticism. One also would ask the question why the topic of dysmaturity has been included in the section dealing with feto-placental physiology. Despite the foregoing remarks, one also has to take into account the fact that the book has a constant emphasis on matters of practical clinical importance. There is little doubt that this book will be popular on merit and the author is to be congratulated, not only for compiling such a useful volume, but for fulfilling the task which he assigned himself.

D. Charles, St. John’s


The first volume in this series describes some of the more recent techniques for the elucidation of normal mammalian embryology. Normal embryonic development is a precisely controlled process involving cell division, cytodifferentiation, induction and morphogenetic movements. Such phenomena are the chronological expression of an interplay between genetic activity and the cellular or extra-cellular environment. The borderland of embryology is teratology and it is well-established that the end result of cellular injury

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in the embryo is developmental malformation which can result in experimental animals by the administration of a wide variety of agents during the course of pregnancy. As pointed out in this volume, susceptibility to teratogenic agents varies greatly during the course of gestation. During
the early stages of cleavage, the embryo is relatively impervious to even high doses of such noxious agents. The mechanism why this is so remains undetermined. Similarly, susceptibility to teratogenesis decreases as differentiation and organogenesis proceeds. When organogenesis is complete, the fetus responds to teratogenic insult by growth retardation. The five articles which comprise this volume cover both the basic and applied aspects of normal and abnormal development. Furthermore, recent research which is portrayed indicates that it is unlikely that the blastocyst will suffer damage that will result in fetal malformation. One of the papers concludes that the most serious consequence of pre-implantation disturbances of whatever origin, is depressed fertility. From this point of view, it offers considerable scope for the development of new contraceptive methods to operate against the early embryo rather than fertilization.

An interesting chapter pertains to the screening of drugs for teratogenic activity. It indicates that there are species differences in drug metabolism, e.g., meclozine is teratogenic in rats but this is not the case in man. Research work that has been carried on indicates that the affected species produces a primary metabolite not found or only found in minimal amounts in the non-affected species. Similarly, the same chapter delineates the difficulties of assessing teratogenic agents. In fact, the author concludes that Karnofsky’s law holds true – namely, that any material can be teratogenic if given at the right dose, at the right time, to the right species.

In the paper dealing with human organ culture, a word of caution appears concerning the fact that there may be other causes for malformation apart from the known viruses and drugs. It also confirms that the teratogenic activity of the majority of drugs ultimately manifest their effects through a common pathway – namely, embryonal cellular damage. Each of the five papers are well written and have, in a convincing manner, shown that in respect to teratogenic effects of drugs and even viruses, we are only reaching out to the tip of the iceberg and continued research is essential and as a result in due course, we may well envisage the confirmation of the statement of the Bard of Avon – namely, ‘There is a history in all men’s lives figuring the nature of the times decreased the which observed, a man may prophesy with near aim of the chance of things as not yet come to life’.

There is little doubt that this volume and its successors can be recommended to all those interested in the numerous aspects of congenital malformation.

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