Book Reviews

Emesis in Anti-Cancer Therapy. Mechanisms and Treatment
Edited by P.R.L. Andrews & G.J. Sanders, London: Chapman & Hall Medical, 1993, 256 pp. £52.50.

The advances made during the last decade in the knowledge of physiology and treatment of radiotherapy and chemotherapy-induced emesis have been so impressive that a comprehensive textbook aimed at compiling the vast amount of information in this field has been long overdue. In this respect, the book by Andrews and Sanger fulfils an important gap in medical literature. The contributions of the editors in the field of antiemetics have been so transcendent that I believe they are among the most authoritative investigators to undertake the enterprise of editing such a book.

The book offers many excellent reviews that I am sure will be highly appreciated by preclinical and clinical investigators involved or interested in antiemetic therapy. I personally enjoyed the updates on measurement and mechanisms of nausea, changes in gastro-intestinal motility associated with emesis, neurotransmitters and receptors of the emetic pathway, mechanisms or emesis induced by chemotherapy and radiotherapy, and pharmacology of antiemetic agents. Many of the chapters include a significant number of suggestions and considerations able to generate interesting ideas to be tested in preclinical and clinical setting. However, no book is perfect and, as a clinician, I am somewhat critical of the selection of certain other chapters. Although the authors stated in the preface that 'the problems of nausea and vomiting are set in a more general context of anti-cancer therapy by a detailed study of the pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics of chemotherapeutic drugs and an examination of their general toxicities', I do not find that this argument justifies the inclusion of two chapters on such general topics as 'The pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics of chemotherapeutic agents' and 'Toxicology of chemotherapeutic agents' in a book specifically devoted to emetic mechanisms and antiemetic therapy. In addition, despite its title, the book devotes just one brief chapter out of eleven to the practical management of chemotherapy-induced emesis. In my opinion, those readers involved in the clinical treatment of cancer patients would have appreciated a more detailed analysis of the plethora of problems associated with the management of nausea and vomiting in the clinical setting. In spite of my reservations concerning some of the selections, I feel that this book constitutes an excellent and necessary reference text which should occupy a preferential place in the library of all those involved in one way or another in the physiology and management of cancer treatment-related emesis.

M. Martin

Colorectal Cancer. A Scientific Perspective

A.R. Kinsella, Cambridge: CUP, 1992, 159 pp. £40.00

This short book is the first in the series of Cambridge monographs on cancer research to review a specific cancer type. The choice by the editors was an important one, large bowel cancer is the second commonest cancer in the Western World, whose mortality has not changed over the last three decades. It also stands out as a disease that has clinically well defined premalignant lesions, the adenoma, and that in recent years there has been enormous strides in our understanding of the biological basis of carcinogenesis within these entities. The aim of this book was to bring together the epidemiology, cell and molecular biology of the disease, together with a resume of the important clinical features and management

problems. To a great extent it succeeds in this. The only real difficulty I have with this volume is trying to define who it is aimed at. The editors would believe that it is for the expert in the field, but clearly a single author monography such as this cannot hope to give a comprehensive review over a wide range of topics that varies through animal models to clinical and molecular genetics. The book would, however, be an excellent introduction to the young researcher just starting in the field, whether they come from a clinical or scientific background and to the general reader wanting to keep abreast of the rapid developments in this area. Each of the chapters are succinct and the avoidance of jargon will make it attractive for the non-specialist reader. Being an essentially single author book, there was an evenness about the contents and the reviews of each aspect of the disease were well balanced. The chapters relating to the molecular and clinical aspects were the strongest, reflecting the interests of the authors. The clinical section, written by Philip Schofield, was particularly clear and concise.

I would recommend this to scientists who want to understand what the clinical problems are associated with the management of patients with large bowel cancer.

T.G. Cooke

Combined Radiotherapy and Chemotherapy in Clinical Oncology
Edited by A. Horwich, London: Edward Arnold, 1992, 261 pp. £52.50.

This book is a timely review of a controversial and complex subject. As we seek to maximise the benefit from the application of chemotherapy and radiotherapy in the treatment of solid tumours, the permutations are endless. It is difficult to obtain a clear grasp of what has been accomplished in this field and if there are any clear guidelines for patient management. By bringing together well referenced reviews covering the theoretical background and the clinical experience in combined chemoradiography treatments, this book provides a very useful basis for further developments.

The opening chapter, and I think the most important comment of the book, is an analysis by Peto of the type of trials that have been undertaken. While his arguments for large randomised trials are very familiar, the singular absence of data of this type in the field of combined treatments may be the major reason why there is so little clarity or obvious progress in this area.

Three chapters on the theoretical basis of combined chemo- and radiotherapy follow. These are useful reminders both of the potential and the risks of this approach. Some of the analysis is a little impenetrable and relates to laboratory studies of dubious relevance to clinical practice.

The remainder of the book is devoted to chapters on combined therapy by disease site written by leading authorities in their subspecialties. Most are concise, yet readable though the chapter on small cell lung cancer is very wordy. One recurring problem is the use of varying terminology. When chemotherapy is used as the initial treatment is it 'neoadjuvant', 'pre-emptive', 'primary' or 'up front'?

The challenging conclusion from this book is that a very large amount of effort has been expended combining a wide range of protocols yet we have made little progress in defining the role of combined chemotherapy and radiotherapy in standard clinical practise. It is difficult to plan studies that ask the right question and are sufficiently simple to enable us to recruit large numbers of patients to demonstrate the small benefits that are likely to accrue from combination therapy.

This book lays the groundwork for such progress to be made and as such is a useful reference both for the practising oncologist and for those trying to plan the next generation of studies.

T.S. Maughan

Haematological Oncology, Vol. 2

Edited by A. Keating, J. Armitage, A. Burnett & A. Newland, Cambridge:
CUP, 1992, 229 pp. £40.00.

Cambridge Medical Reviews have recently instituted a new volume in their series with the title 'Haematological Oncology'. This publication is produced in a small hard back copy with an identical format to a similar review volume 'Bailliere's Clinical Haematology'. It has obviously been decided by publishers and editors that the format used by Clinical Haematology, that of a regular periodical review in book form which might be regarded as a form of add-on text book, is an extremely worthwhile approach to the ever increasing complexity in the area of haematological oncology. In principle this approach is likely to be justified and is more likely to stand the test of time perhaps than some of the other haematological review publications.

The Editors have chosen exactly the same title as another regular publication and at least in the short term this might be guaranteed to cause a degree of confusion. Advertisement of this series has been low key and this reviewer learned of the existence of this particular volume when receiving a copy for review.

Volume 2 covers a wide ranging series of topics in one issue and in this respect is different from Clinical Haematology where one topic is discussed by different authors from different perspectives. The volume begins with a chapter by Dr Horowitz on the graft-vs-leukaemia effect in bone marrow transplantation. Dr Horowitz, who works within the International Bone Marrow Transplant Registry, gives a good review of this topic for the general reader and for specialist alike. Dr Appelbaum and colleagues from Seattle

discuss the therapy of haematological malignancies using the newer techniques of radioimmunotherapy which they have been involved in developing. Once again this is a pleasing chapter, with well reviewed data. Drs Jones and Hess discuss autologous graft-vs-host disease, a topic which struggles to actually stand by itself as a topic. One feels that perhaps this subject might well have been incorporated in other aspects of graft-vs-host disease biology.

At this point there is a change of direction for this volume with a chapter by Dr Marsh on the pathophysiology and treatment of acquired aplastic anaemia. This is a very nicely constructed chapter and, again, contains all the information required for keeping abreast of this particular topic. It is in this chapter that the excessive referencing begins and I think for articles of this type 147 references, taking up several pages of text, are really unnecessary. Other topics within the book include discussion of growth factors in bone marrow transplantation by Nemunaitis and Singer. This again is a well balanced chapter, but the problem of over referencing persists as it does in the chapter on chronic lymphocytic leukaemia by Dr Polliack, where 205 references consume more space than the following chapter on clinical and molecular aspects of Philadelphia chromosome positive acute lymphoblastic leukaemia by Westbrook and Stock.

The volume concludes with chapters on bone marrow transplantation in the management of advanced Hodgkin's disease by Phillips and colleagues, followed by a chapter on localised extranodal lymphomas by Sutcliffe and Gospodarowicz. This last chapter is extremely informative and in a very logical and compact way summarises an extremely difficult group of disorders.

In summary I would say that each of the individual chapters within this volume was educational, informative and an excellent review. As has been indicated, the widespread nature of the topics covered per volume might subsequently become a problem as the series evolves and the editors may need to focus on more discrete topics for a given issue. In general this looks a good publication, but will have to work hard to maintain the standards set by other publications of the same type.

S.J. Proctor