BOOK REVIEWS

Prevention of Stress Bleeding in Critically Ill Patients: A new concept

Thieme Medical Publishers Inc., New York, 1988. 162 pp. £34.95

This 162 page book comprises 22 papers presented at a multidisciplinary workshop held in Hannover, East Germany in June 1986 on the clinical aspects of stress ulceration and bleeding in the upper gastrointestinal tract.

The first paper gives an outline of the structure, actions and mucosal protective effects of sucralfate, a new sulphated disaccharide. Subsequent articles review the history and development of the use of antacids, histamine (2) receptor antagonists, sucralfate and another new agent, pirenzepine which is a gastric mucosal muscarine receptor antagonist. Numerous comparisons are given of one treatment versus another with the final paper providing a good summary of the effects and complications of each type of treatment.

This is a useful compendium of references and source material for the researcher but has little clinical relevance to the Accident and Emergency Department other than demonstrating the importance of avoiding pulmonary aspiration. Provided the book is available at modest cost (less than £35), it will be a useful addition to an Intensive Care Unit library.

A. J. MORTIMER

Consultant Anaesthetist

Intensive Care Unit

Withington Hospital

Manchester, England

The Right Test. A Physician's Guide to Laboratory Medicine

C. E. SPEICHER.

W. B. Saunders, Philadelphia, 1989. 174 pp. £13.95

Medical decision making and resource management are two topics that preoccupy the minds of many in the health service today and highlight the need for protocols giving guidelines on the use of laboratory tests. Given the number of test procedures available and the complexity of the clinical situations to which they are applied, the production of such protocols is a daunting task. Professor Speicher has shown how it might be done, although his book is, of course, more than a brief protocol. The amount of information he has managed to compress into a work of this size is impressive, particularly as he covers investigations from all

pathology disciplines and even some from other areas. By concentrating on those diseases that form the bulk of contemporary medical practice he has covered most of the tests that are required in the daily work of the physician including those growing areas of morbidity: AIDS, alcoholism and drug abuse. He has even found space for a few pertinent references at the end of each section.

His approach is to take a clinical situation, recommend the investigations required and discuss interpretation. He points out that abnormality is not an all or none phenomenon but that the extent of the abnormality may favour one diagnosis rather than another. He repeatedly draws attention to other factors that may influence results: physiological variation, drugs, differences in methodology, laboratory performance and errors arising at any stage from specimen collection to reporting. In other words, all those aspects of laboratory investigation that pathologists would like clinicians to remember when studying laboratory reports but suspect that they may not always do so.

There is perhaps the need for a note of caution. Procedures for investigation must to some extent be a matter of opinion and the views expressed in the book may not coincide with those held by your local pathologists in every detail. The author is a laboratory director in North America where the number of investigations performed per case is higher than in this country and considerably more resources are applied to screening for disease. Certainly, with the level of NHS funding that exists today, it would not be possible for laboratories here to handle the work that would result if all the author's proposals were widely followed. Be that as it may, such considerations do not detract from the interest of the book, which provides a thought-provoking view of medical practice in an affluent society. It seems quite possible that we shall be following the same paths in Britain: screening for carcinoma of the cervix has already been established here for several years, lipid screening is gaining pace; there are those who advocate screening for rectal carcinoma and doubtless we shall be hearing from those who would press for screening for carcinoma of the prostate.

I would recommend the book as worth-while reading material for clinicians, particularly those in their early post-graduate years. It contains a wealth of information, is clearly written and, in the light of current prices, represents good value for money.

Dr. GOWLAND
Consultant Chemical Pathologist
Withington Hospital
Manchester, England