

## *Book Review*

**Basic and Clinical Pharmacology**, Edited by B. G. Katzung, 3rd ed. Prentice/Hall International, 1987, £26.25.

Pharmacology is a relatively new science and at the level of undergraduate textbooks it is still possible to produce a single volume text that encompasses the whole field. However the rapid expansion of knowledge means that it is unlikely that a single individual can be aware of all the available information to a high level, or indeed if they are, have time to write a large textbook. Consequently many texts, including the present one, are multi-author works. To make such a book work, and not simply become a hotch-potch of different approaches, is the role of a good editor. Professor Katzung has imposed a fairly rigid format on the bevy of authors involved to achieve the desired outcome. The chapters break up into an introduction, basic pharmacology, including chemistry, pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics, and finally clinical aspects. The result is certainly readable, and the use of bold headings and a good index makes dipping into this book for information an easy task.

The preface tells us that the book is aimed at health practitioners, hence presumably the chapter on prescription writing, and students of the health sciences. The book begins with chapters on basic pharmacology, pharmacokinetics, pharmacodynamics and drug evaluation, which serve as ground work for later chapters on the various drug classes. The information provided throughout the book is sound, but there is a tendency to present the knowledge in a factual way without enough discussion of the background to please the basic, rather than medical, science student. Obviously in a text which also seeks to cover clinical aspects, space is severely limited. But it is a pity that there is not a more critical approach. For example, discussion of receptor types as they arise is limited to a mention that various types of a particular class do exist. There is no background to the exacting pharmacology and reasoning that went on behind these discoveries, and from which the student might properly learn.

Of particular interest to analysts will be the chapters on drug metabolism and pharmacokinetics. However these are unlikely to be of great use to the serious student of this art. Like other aspects of the book they are meant as a general view for the undergraduate. On the other hand there is limited information on therapeutic drug levels, plasma half-lives etc. of various drugs, and there are interesting chapters on paediatric and geriatric pharmacology which discuss problems of drug metabolism and pharmacokinetics in these patients. Also there is a large appendix which covers drug interactions, lists of approved/trade names (though this is for the American market) and problems which may be encountered by the laboratory worker faced with the analysis of biochemical parameters in patients on drug therapy.

In addition to a student text, this book will be useful as a starting point for reading in unfamiliar areas, and as a quick source of reference, though in these respects the references are somewhat varied. As a student text more directed further reading, rather than references to the primary literature, would be useful. The book certainly achieves its aim in providing a readable up-to-date text; for example recently introduced drugs such as ranitidine, aztreonam and atracurium are mentioned. This is no doubt due to the excellent habit of producing a new edition at regular intervals, this being the 3rd in five years. This book should be a success in the highly competitive market of medical pharmacology texts.

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