Book Review

Textbook of Adverse Drug Reactions. Fourth Edition
Edited by D. M. Davies
Published 1991 Oxford University Press, Oxford
879 pages
ISBN 0 19 262045 2 £95.00

Medicine taking is a common occurrence. On average, men visit their general practitioners $3\frac{1}{2}$ times per annum and for women the figure is 5. More than two-thirds of such encounters end with a prescription. In hospitals it is common for patients to receive between 6 and 8 medicines during their stay. Furthermore, with the changing demography of our population, there is a tendency for the number of prescriptions to rise with time. Prescribers need a reliable source of information to assist them and frequently turn to pharmacists for help. The questions they tend to ask fall into 8 main categories. These include the method of drug administration and dosage, the indication for choice of drug, identification of substances brought by the patient (sometimes from abroad), the availability and supply of certain preparations, details of pharmacologic actions, pharmaceutical problems and drug interactions. In addition, about 15% of enquiries relate to adverse effects of drug treatment. These are said to affect between 10 and 18% of patients admitted to hospital and account for approximately 1 consultation in 40 in the setting of general clinical practice.

Most adverse effects of drug therapy relate to the pharmacologic action of the compound in question and they can be predicted from a knowledge of its pharmacologic actions. By contrast, type B reactions are often unpredictable and bear no obvious relationship to the pharmacology of the drug substance. As a consequence, it is particularly important to have available a reliable source of information for rapid reference. The fourth edition of Davies' book goes a long way to fulfilling these requirements.

After introductory chapters, the text is organized according to bodily systems, e.g. the gastrointestinal tract, liver, etc. This system commends itself to doctors as it is the way in which the majority of their patients will present, e.g. with diarrhoea, jaundice, etc. In reviewing the book I used it for a period of a little over one month. During that time I had to consult 19 of the 30 chapters. In almost all instances I found them to be helpful, especially the section on the ear, nose and throat. By contrast, that on the eye was too brief and rather dogmatic. All of the chapters which I consulted were well referenced and those which I checked were correct, except for two minor errors. The book is well produced and at £95 represents good value. For those who specialise in the supply of drug information, the fourth edition of this book will not compete with Meyler and Herxheimer's classic on side effects of drugs. Nevertheless, Davies Textbook of Adverse Reactions is easier to use and significantly cheaper. Pharmacists will, in addition, need access to further information about drug interactions (which account for 5–6% of enquiries). Since this book only deals with those which are deemed to be clinically important, on such occasions they will need access to either the text by Hansen or the most recent edition of Stockley's book.

CHARLES F. GEORGE
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON, UK

Book Review

Neurotransmitters and Drugs. Third Edition
Edited by Zygmunt L. Kruk and Christopher J. Pycock
Published 1991 Chapman & Hall, London
204 pages
ISBN 0 412 36100 0 £11.95
ISBN 0 412 36110 8 paperback

This book has specific chapters on acetylcholine, dopamine, 5-HT, histamine, inhibitory and excitatory amino acids and peptides. For each transmitter the synthesis, storage, release and inactivation is described, together with a brief sketch of therapeutic applications or function. The book is intended for students of medicine, pharmacy and biological disciplines, as well as for post-graduates. However, I see little in this book of benefit to pharmacology students since it contains no further information than is found in excellent general textbooks, such as Rang & Dale. Sadly the authors missed the opportunity to provide clear summary tables of receptor sub-types for each transmitter, where these are located and what function they have. The table of transmitters, receptors and transducers does not bother with muscarinic M_1-, M_2- and M_3-receptors or with quisqualate and AMPA receptors, although it does list sub-types for other transmitters. Similarly, many of the interesting functional roles have been omitted. With the rapid expansion of neuropharmacology, science students would do much better to read recent up-to-date review articles. I also see little hope of persuading busy pre-clinical medical students to read a book of this length, which covers only part of pharmacology. These students show a strong preference for the briefest of texts, illustrated with clear diagrams, such as that by Neal. The length and detail would be more appropriate for pharmacy students, but perhaps the group most likely to benefit would be psychiatrists taking Part I MRCPsych.

SANDRA E. FILE
GUY'S HOSPITAL, LONDON, UK