BOOK REVIEWS

Pathology of Septic Shock Current Topics in Microbiology and Immunology, volume 216

Edited by E. T. RIETSCHER and H. WAGNER. 1996. ISBN 3-540-610256-X. Springer-Verlag, Berlin. Pp. 321. DM 210.00.

As with all multi-author books, considerable variation between the quality of the chapters and some repetition is evident. The book moves smoothly from the initial overview sections through mechanisms of action, multi-organ failure and bacterial translocation, finishing with prevention and treatment. Chapters work best when they review the literature comprehensively (as in the nitric oxide section), rather than concentrate on the authors' own experimental data (some going as far as acknowledging the grants that supported their work). Generally the single author sections are more fluent and Brandtzaeg's overview of pathogenesis is an enjoyable read. Conversely, one wonders why it takes 22 authors to compile the chapter on endotoxin and whether this contributes to its rather fragmented style.

The book attempts to cover all causes of septic shock and includes a chapter on superantigens. Unfortunately, this is confined almost entirely to staphylococcal enterotoxin B and contains so many abbreviations that at times it appears to be written in code. No mention is made of fungal-induced sepsis.

Septic shock is a fast-moving field and inevitably dates rapidly. Nevertheless the book represents an excellent state of the art review. The role of CD14, including soluble CD14, is well described as is the importance of down-regulatory cytokines, although Th1/Th2 responses get only a passing mention.

At 210DM (c. £80) for a relatively slim volume, the book is expensive, but a worthwhile investment for anyone involved in clinical or applied research in this area. For the clinicians amongst us, it will enable us to hold our own on the ICU ward round.

R. BARNES

Toxoplasma gondii

Edited by U. GROSS. 1996. ISBN 3-540-61300-5. Springer Verlag, Berlin. Pp. 274. DM 174.00.

This book presents a multi-author statement of the current knowledge of the interaction between *Toxoplasma gondii* and its animal or human host. The text is set out in four major sections: the genetics of the parasite population; antigens and genes of *T. gondii*; immune response; diagnosis and treatment. Individual chapters within each section incorporate an introduction, conclusions and references.

The strengths of the book are the comprehensive reviews of basic scientific knowledge of *T. gondii* written by leading authorities in specialised areas of research. Weaknesses include the uninspiring nature of the 31 figures and 14 tables which could be enhanced in both quantity and quality. For example, the complex discussions of cell types and cytokines involved in the human response to toxoplasma infection would be much easier to follow if summarised in

diagrammatic form. Greater editorial control might have eliminated some of the repetition often found in multi-author texts, particularly in the introductions to each chapter. There are the frequent references to unpublished work, often from the chapter author's own centre. The reader should recall that work might be unpublished, due to constraints of time, or unpublishable because of fundamental defect.

In general, the text represents a valuable source of reference data for the research scientists. Clinical microbiologists and physicians will find the book less useful, with the exceptions of two commendably thorough chapters, one on vaccines and the other on toxoplasmosis associated with AIDS. The overall impression is that of conscientious scientists busily trying to answer questions which, all too often, have never been posed by health carers. Whether this reflects a lack of appropriate focus amongst researchers or failure to grasp the potential of modern investigation techniques by clinicians remains to be seen.

R. HOLLIMAN

Cholera and the Ecology of *Vibrio cholerae*

Edited by B. S. DRASAR and B. D. FORREST. 1996. ISBN 0-412-61220-8. Chapman and Hall, London. Pp. 355. £45.00.

Despite improvements in public health and water and sanitation, cholera remains one of the major global pandemic diseases. This publication brings together a number of the issues relevant to the contemporary understanding of the pathogen and the disease.

The book begins with an overview of *Vibrio cholerae* and the epidemiology of cholera. This chapter is a valuable introduction to the terminology used in describing the antigenic properties of *V. cholerae* and related species which are fundamental to the following chapters. The chapter also provides a review of the epidemiology of cholera, particularly the pattern of pandemics from the early nineteenth century to the 'new' pandemic caused by the O139 serotype.

The second chapter, by Professor Cook, provides a fascinating account of the social history and the early epidemiology of the disease. After describing the introduction of 'Asiatic cholera' into Europe early in the 19th century, there is a detailed account of the 'Broad Street Saga'. Theories on the causation of cholera at that time ranged from the 'electrical and ozone theory', via various theories of 'miasma and carbon deficiency', to the 'amacular and contagious' theories. The outbreak around the Broad Street pump is minutely described, reminding us as ever that detailed epidemiology based on careful observation is central in the understanding of infectious diseases.

The following chapter is a less satisfactory mix of history and current practice on the role of rehydration in the management of cholera. The chapter illustrates the dilemma of a volume that has an overall leaning towards the unresolved question of the association between the ecology of *V. cholerae* and the epidemiology of cholera (six of the 10 chapters), and attempts at the same time to be a comprehensive text.