This is a well produced multiauthored general textbook on AIDS with abundant references up to well into 1988. Its editor is well known for contributions in the field of virology of AIDS and thirty of the thirty six authors work in San Francisco, the epicentre of the AIDS epidemic in the West. The book is aimed at researchers, clinicians and incoming students in the field and its purpose is to review the history and the many aspects of the disease.

There are twenty one chapters covering epidemiological, virological, immunological, pathological and clinical aspects. The short, well balanced, account of central nervous system disorders by Levy et al. is intended for the generalist. Peripheral nervous system involvement is not dealt with and does not even appear in the index. Neurologists will find the various chapters on other systemic manifestations useful as overviews.

Many aspects of pathology are discussed in depth but they are also made entertaining by tracing the development of concepts and major discoveries. In this respect the editor’s chapter on the detection and pathogenesis of human immunodeficiency virus is outstanding. The chapters on molecular biology of HIV infection by Robson and on immunology by Krowka et al. are clear and easier to read for the non initiated than is usual for these topics. The central section of the book seemed strongest, but this opinion may only reflect the bias of the clinical reviewer. The chapter on epidemiology made interesting reading and those on AIDS in Africa and Haiti made as much as is possible of the relative paucity of reliable clinical (as opposed to serological) data in these areas. AIDS in haemophilia, heterosexuals, transfusion recipients and children all receive separate chapters. The one on transfusion recipients is particularly clear and also courageous in pointing out the role of homosexual donors in the spread of the disease via this route.

The clinical sections abound in useful information, from a comprehensive review of the persistent lymphadenopathy syndrome and thrombocytopenic purpura by Abrams through lymphomas, Kaposi’s sarcoma, pulmonary complications, hairy leucoplaikia and other oral syndromes and various infections. The section on pathology seemed the weakest. Chapter on care systems used in San Francisco and on the prospects of developing a vaccine close the book. Clinical readers on this side of the Atlantic will note the lack of chapters on the ophthalmological, dermatological and gastroenterological manifestations. It may reflect the pattern of services in San Francisco since some of the topics in these specialties are scattered through the text, including descriptions of individual opportunistic infections. Even so, it results in some notorious omissions and lack of balance in the presentation of important clinical information. For example, CMV retinitis and cotton wool spots receive just three paragraphs.

After reading the book, those who work with AIDS patients will want to have obtained some idea as to why AIDS has spread within the male homosexual community in the West so devastatingly, so that over 70% of the patients reported belong to this risk group. This biological fact is central to any theory on pathogenesis. However this is not dealt with in any systematic way. This glaring omission is, unexpectedly, pointed out by one of the contributors when discussing CMV infections. After concluding that a major route of acquisition of CMV infections is exposure of the anorectal mucosa to CMV infected semen, Dreu states that the same considerations apply to HIV transmission. He then refers to another chapter, which does not exist, so that the quotation literally says “(see Chapter ??)” (page 513).

Despite these criticisms the book should appeal to a wide audience as intended by the editor. It should be available in medical libraries but clinicians and researchers with a special interest in AIDS may wish to have their own copy.

RJ GUILLOFF


This book was produced after the meeting in 1987 of an invited group of thirty five neurologists, ophthalmologists and surgeons from both sides of the Atlantic. The stated aim of the editor was “to try and synthesise a common approach to the study, diagnosis and treatments of patients . . . with amaurosis fugax”, and the views of the group were presented as a “consensus statement”. It is rather unusual to turn what I presume to be the position papers presented at the meeting into a formal textbook. Nevertheless, a single text which deals with ocular vascular anatomy, the pathophysiology, clinical features, natural history, differential diagnosis, investigation and treatment of amaurosis fugax is to be welcomed since, in many larger books, this condition tends to be treated as a minor variant of cerebral TIAs. A drawback is that the degree of detail varies quite markedly between the 21 chapters with some controversial areas being discussed in great depth even if they are not encountered frequently in patients with amaurosis fugax. For example, almost 15 per cent of the book is devoted to discussing the relevance of carotid atheroma to chronic ocular ischaemia and to the use of the term venous stasis retinopathy.

There is rather more repetition than is usual even in multi-authored texts although it could be argued that this reflects areas of consensus amongst the authors. However, the duplication of four figures in chapters 1 and 8 and the three photographs of a cherry-red spot, despite being of the same high quality as the other illustrations, add little to one’s understanding of the text but probably significantly to the price. The consensus statement is a fashionable way of attracting both medical and media attention to the problems of implementing treatments of proven value e.g. coronary artery bypass grafting. However, I do not think the same technique can be used to try and establish the place of a treatment of as yet unproven value, such as carotid endarterectomy. The opposing views on this issue have arisen because of a lack of unbiased evidence; and simply putting the proponents in the same room without significant new data is unlikely to result in many converts to either side. Almost inevitably, the group did not produce a clear statement on the indications for this procedure. On the other hand, one would have no hesitation in recommending the well written “consensus statements” on pathophysiology, aetiology, differential diagnosis and investigation to any student or membership candidate.

Many of the chapters contain extensive references to both seminal papers and recent articles, in many cases written by the authors, making it a useful book to dip into. This is helped by the comprehensive index. It is for the well funded library rather than the personal collection.

JOHN BAMFORD


This volume is number 52 in the History of Medicine series issued under the auspices of the library of New York Academy of Medicine. It is based upon a manuscript from the Riccardian Library in Florence.