The Hospital Autopsy (2nd edn)

Edited by Julian Burton and Guy Rutty
Arnold 2001
Price £55.00. Pp 186
ISBN 0340764201

This is the second edition of this book, updated considerably since the first in 1993. It presents a well-structured, simple approach to most aspects of modern autopsy practice. The initial chapters address the evolution of the autopsy and the reasons for its recent decline in popularity, and also consider ways in which the autopsy could be made more popular and undergo a revival. Encouraging public support for this procedure and better educational portrayal is seen as the way forward.

Chapters on the legal aspects of autopsy practice and the Coroner's system plus issues around consent are covered well, and biological safety issues and mortuary design are explained. Descriptive chapters outline external and internal examination of the body, evisceration techniques and systematic and specialized dissection of various organs and body systems. These are clear and concise with good quality simple black and white illustrations.

The basic principles of fetal, perinatal and infant autopsies and the maternal autopsy are then covered. Simple, straightforward chapters follow on obtaining specimens for toxicology and analyses, and the microbiological aspects of specimens obtained at autopsy. There is an interesting chapter on anaphylactic deaths, discussing how these types of death may be missed, giving clues to raise suspicion and describing their investigation. The final chapters cover autopsy demonstration, reporting and teaching, body reconstruction, and the autopsy and clinical audit.

This is a thoroughly useful, easily readable and practical book, which deserves a place on all morticians, trainee and senior pathologists' benches. It will not be confined to the bookcase.

Emyr W Benbow, University of Manchester

Teledermatology

Edited by Richard Wootton and Amanda Oakley
Royal Society of Medicine Press 2002
Price £24.95. Pp 331
ISBN 1853155071

Teledermatology is the first book dedicated exclusively to this subject. It is a fascinating, well-presented and clearly laid-out introduction to the discipline, and a timely addition to the literature.

Teledermatology contains four sections with chapters by most of the leading experts in the field. These comprise: background and technical matters, introducing and detailing techniques and equipment; current experience – diagnosis and patient management, with descriptions of the most successful clinical applications of teledermatology to date; current experience – education; and a section on the future of teledermatology, including chapters on standardization, possible future applications and the health economics of its use.

Telemedicine is being increasingly investigated to improve delivery of care in various specialties including dermatology. However, there have been relatively few clinical studies of teledermatology: most have been pilot and feasibility projects, usually abandoned after the initial research and enthusiasm. A bewildering variety of techniques have been used and few studies have described the successful use of teledermatology to support or provide clinical dermatological services.

Teledermatology does not set out to be the definitive textbook on the subject (which may not be written for several years), but will help readers make sense of it and begin to assess how it might apply to their clinical practice. It will not only be of interest to dermatologists working in the field; those working in other areas of telemedicine will find relevant material. It will be of interest to health service managers, imaging and technology staff as well.

James Vestey, Raigmore Hospital NHS Trust

Statistical Methods in Medical Research (4th edn)

Edited by P Armitage, G Berry, JNS Matthews
Blackwell Science 2001
Price £55.00. Pp 817
ISBN 0632054301

Armitage and Berry has long been a highly respected reference book for medical statisticians and health services researchers. First published in 1971, the text is now in its fourth edition, having acquired a third author. The revised text continues the fine tradition: authoritative, comprehensive and (relatively – for a statistical reference text) accessible.

The book remains true to its original aims and covers most of the statistical tools and techniques that are likely to be encountered in medical research. It is packed with examples, and accompanied by lucid prose. Nonetheless, it moves at a brisk pace and is replete with mathematical formulations that require more than a nodding acquaintance with manipulative techniques. That said, the text is carefully constructed to allow those less comfortable with, for example, matrix algebra or calculus to follow the logic if not the detail.

This new edition has been expanded and reorganized. Probably the most important additions are a much fuller treatment of Bayesian approaches to statistical inference, greater emphasis on logistic and related regression models for the analysis of categorical data, and greater in-depth coverage of the organizational and analytical aspects of clinical trials. All of these are welcome.

Over 800 pages long, with some 22 pages of index (most useful), and around 700 references, this is a significant reference work and a useful addition to any health-care researcher's library. That it manages to convey such a breadth of complex statistical understanding with such clarity and precision is impressive indeed.

Huw Davies, University of St Andrews