BRAIN TUMORS. 1999. Edited by Harry S. Greenberg, William F. Chandler, Howard M. Sandler. Published by Oxford University Press. 350 pages. C$176.00 approx.

Brain tumors is a new monograph in the Contemporary Neurology Series written for "neurologists and other physicians who participate in the diagnosis and treatment of patients with brain tumours". The book is organized into 15 chapters the first seven of which are general chapters on the principles of brain tumour biology, imaging, surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy. The remaining eight chapters are disease specific, including overviews of the diagnosis and management of high grade gliomas, low grade astrocytoma, oligodendroglioma, posterior fossa tumours, CNS lymphoma, pituitary and pineal region tumours, extra axial tumours, and brain metastases. Each chapter has a uniform format including reviews of the history, epidemiology, basic biology and pathology, clinical presentation and differential diagnosis, common work up, and treatment including prognostic details. The usefulness of a uniform chapter format such as this allows as individual to pick up the book as a quick reference. However, in a cover to cover read, much is repeated and of less value to the seasoned clinician. For example, details of the neuro-imaging appearance of these tumours and the differential diagnosis tend to be repetitive from subtype to subtype of brain tumour.

Nevertheless, this is a very personal and useful book – the product of an experienced brain tumour dedicated multi-disciplinary team. It was somewhat disappointing that this text book is less than current. For example, in the chapter entitled "Brain Tumor Biology" there are 217 references of which two are from 1998 and there none from 1999. The preface for the book is dated July 1998 thus the book was likely completed with knowledge only up to including early or mid- 1998. In some chapters, recent information was obviously added into the already written manuscript. For example, the seminal discovery of genetic predictors of response and survival in oligodendroglial tumours by Cairncross et al published in 1998 was added into the chapter on brain tumour biology.

Chapter 4 on surgery for brain tumours consists of only three pages and is relatively weak. One can presume that the intention of the editors was to include disease specific surgical opinions scattered throughout the remaining chapters. In chapter 8, on malignant astrocytoma, discussion of the always controversial topic of cytoreductive surgery for malignant glioma is presented in a fashion that is based more upon personal experience than on evidence.

Discussion of supportive care issues of brain tumour patients are generally well-done, however, several statements are outdated. Concerning anticoagulation prophylaxis for the purposes of prevention of venous thrombo-embolism, the authors state that "anticoagulant prophylaxis must be considered before surgery and again in the post operative period". However, a recent randomized controlled trial was terminated prematurely when it was found that the initiation of preoperative low molecular Heparin resulted in excess bleeding risk to patients (Dickenson et al, Neurosurgery 1998; 43:1074-1080).

Chapter 6 concerning recent advances in radiotherapy for brain tumours lends support to the concept of interstitial brachytherapy for malignant gliomas. The discussion is somewhat imbalanced, most notably because of the exclusion of reference to the published randomized phase III trial of Laperriere et al in 1998. A similarly important randomized control trial was omitted from the chapter on Brain Metastases. Specifically, a good discussion a good discussion of the role of surgery for patients with single brain metastases, the important randomized controlled trial published by Mintz et al (Cancer 1996-78: 1470-1476) is omitted. This is surprising given that this study was published well before the editorial deadline for this book. However, the conclusions reached by the authors seemed to be concordant with common practice.

All in all, I think that this text book provides a good historical overview and broad perspective of the treatment of brain tumours in the last two decades of the 20th Century. It would make a useful reference in the library of clinicians treating patients with brain tumours. However, persons seeking the most up-to-date knowledge of the field would require this reference plus knowledge of the most recent literature.

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ORGANELLE DISEASES, CLINICAL FEATURES, DIAGNOSIS, PATHOGENESIS AND MANAGEMENT. 1997. Edited by Derek A. Applegarth, James E. Dimmick and Judith G. Hall. Published by Chapman and Hall. 450 pages. C$240.00 approx.

This copy was received for review in 2,000, three years after it's publication date, so that the most recent references are for 1996.

This book is from the British Columbia Children's Hospital group which has edited and also contributed substantially to the entire text. It covers the topic of organelle diseases – disorders of lysosomes, peroxisomes and mitochondria – in detail from the different aspects of basic science, pathology, clinical recognition and treatment and laboratory diagnosis.

The editors have assembled a distinguished team of contributors from the U.S., Britain, Australia and the Netherlands as well as Vancouver. In his preface, Derek Applegarth points out that the burden of organelle diseases together outnumber those of the small molecule disorders such as the aminoacidopathies, and together they have an incidence of about 40 per 100,000 live births if one includes phenylketonuria and galactosemia.

The section on lysosomal storage diseases contains a well-written chapter by Lorne Clarke on their clinical diagnosis and there are good contributions on both the laboratory diagnosis and also the microscopic anatomy of these conditions. The peroxisome disorders are superbly reviewed by Hugo Moser with his unmatched clinical experience of the adrenoleukodystrophies in the section on diagnosis and therapy and there are helpful sections on laboratory diagnosis and pathology. The mitochondrial disorders are well-covered both in the basic sciences as well as in their multiple syndromic aspects, mostly by the group from Newcastle and I found the clinical segment particularly good with helpful tables.

There is a final section on "Practical Disorders" which includes a description of available therapies by Lorne Clarke as well as more basic sections on how to construct a pedigree and on clinical examination. There are also helpful sections on specimen consent for DNA screening, a list of web sites as resources for medical scientists as well as families, and a very helpful glossary for the uninitiated or the temporally burdened.

The target audience for this book is not entirely clear: it is not a clinical pocket book to steer the clinician who is relatively unsophisticated in metabolic disorders and who seeks this type of guidance. This type of help is to be found in such smaller texts as "A clinical guide to inherited metabolic diseases", by Joe Clarke from