

Book reviews

Kidney stones – medical and surgical management. Edited by Frederic L Coe, Murray J Favus, Charles Y C Pak, Joan H Parks and Glen M Preminger. Lippincott-Raven Publishers, Philadelphia, PA, USA. 1996. 1,136 pp. £211.00.

Urolithiasis is a symptom and not a disease *sui generis*. Many cases are still, correctly in the present state of knowledge, labelled as being idiopathic. However, the size of this residual group is decreasing and will continue to do so as we learn more about the factors that initiate and promote crystal growth and aggregation in urine and, as the knowledge that we already have, is applied more widely. Urinary stone disease was, until relatively recently, almost wholly within the purview of the surgeon. It is, however, now generally recognised that patients with this problem are best handled collaboratively by a surgeon, physician and an interventional radiologist. For this reason, if for no other, the appearance of this book is timely.

This work deals comprehensively with both the theoretical and practical aspects of the stone problem. Part I, 'Biophysical and biological bases of stone formation', deals exhaustively with the relevant aspects of the physical chemistry of crystal formation and growth in urine together with the general aspects of calcium metabolism and the overall physiology of the main constituents of urinary stones. This is a very impressive section and the title of the book leaves one unprepared for such a detailed and lucid treatment. Part II, 'Clinical and laboratory evaluation of urolithiasis' deals with diagnostic problems. Here, again, the problems are thoroughly reviewed from the clinical, biochemical and imaging points of view. I was

surprised to find that the value of the enzymological methods of measuring urine and plasma oxalate developed by G A Rose and G P Kasidas and which perform well, was not emphasised. Small changes in the urinary oxalate concentration have a greater effect on calcium oxalate crystallisation than do similar changes in urinary calcium concentration. Thus, since calcium oxalate stones are the most common type encountered in cases of so called idiopathic nephrolithiasis, it is, in my opinion, at least as important to measure urinary oxalate as it is to measure the urinary calcium, and plasma oxalate measurements are essential for the evaluation of patients in whom there is any reason to suspect hyperoxalaemia. Part III, 'Surgical management of stones', deals exhaustively with the modern but still evolving stone disruption and percutaneous removal techniques. Part IV, 'Medical and surgical management of specific stone types', deals fairly with the recognised medical conditions which present or may present with urolithiasis. It is unfortunate that this section of the work was presumably completed before the publication of recent studies on X-linked nephrolithiasis implicating a putative renal chloride channel in the aetiology of these diseases^{1,2}, which may have broader implications in relation to the multifactorial aetiology of many cases of calcium containing urinary stones. Part V deals with the special problems of struvite (calcium, magnesium, ammonium, phosphate) stones and Part VI deals with urate/uric acid stones and cystinuria, together with the special problems of calculi in the bladder and urinary diversions, those associated with anatomic abnormalities, pregnancy and childhood.

This book is a comprehensive and readable reference work. It provides a basic background of information for nephrologists, urologists and advanced post-graduate students, to all of whom I would recommend it strongly. The individual sections are exhaustively referenced although the delay, which accompanies the production of a comprehensive, multi-author book, inevitably takes its toll of the most recent literature citations.

This is a book which should certainly be on the shelves of a renal unit or a postgraduate library and will deservedly often be off the shelf also.

References

- 1 Lloyd SE, Pearce SHS, Fisher SE, Steinmeyer K, *et al*. A common molecular basis for three inherited kidney stone diseases. *Nature* 1996;**379**:445–9.
- 2 Herbert SC. Crystal-clear chloride channels. *Nature* 1996;**379**:398–9.

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Euthanasia: death, dying and the medical duty. Scientific editors, G R Dunstan and P J Lachmann. *British Medical Bulletin*, vol 52, number 2, Royal Society of Medicine Press Ltd. London, 1996. 172 pp. £45.

The debate on euthanasia is likely to run and run. Increasingly sophisticated means of keeping people alive give rise to increasingly difficult questions about when or whether they should be employed, and tend to fuel public fears about prolonged and degrading terminal conditions. This collection of articles for the *British Medical Bulletin* is a useful addition to the debate, not least because half of them were written by specialists and GPs who have to consider these problems daily. The authors show an admirable sensitivity to the needs and feelings of their patients, but they are also aware of their own need for clear