

BOOK REVIEW

Molecular Medicine: An Introductory Text for Medical Students. R.J. TRENT.
Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, UK, 1993. 238 pp.

Lecture Notes on Molecular Medicine. J. BRADLEY, D. JOHNSON AND D. RUBENSTEIN.
Blackwell Science, Oxford, UK, 1995. 151 pp.

WHAT IS MOLECULAR MEDICINE?

Nobody can deny that medical students (and others seeking to keep abreast of modern developments in clinical medicine) need a reasonable grounding in molecular science as applied to medicine. This, however, begs the question of whether the best approach is to cover the relevant areas of clinical practice and point out how molecular biology can contribute to diagnosis and management (thus using clinical examples as teaching aids for molecular biology) or to do the opposite, i.e. to provide a strong grounding in the basic science and then to reinforce the message by reference to some clinical problems. These two textbooks illustrate rather well these two alternatives.

Both are compact, basic texts aimed at the medical student audience and liberally illustrated with line drawings (supplemented, in the case of R.J. Trent's book with a few photographs). The first, however, devotes only one of its ten chapters to basic technology, all the rest dealing with medical applications, including ethical and social issues. "Lecture Notes", though

two of the three contributors are clinicians, virtually reverses these proportions. Despite this, and its more recent publication date, "Lecture Notes" covers the technology in only slightly greater detail than the "Introductory Text". The notes format is very obvious, making this a convenient text for checking a fact or a concept but not exactly easy reading.

Advances in molecular biology have been so rapid that many clinicians, even recent graduates, find the prospect of grappling with the subject completely daunting. Either of these texts will help to overcome such inhibitions. They go right back to basics, explain the concepts in a relatively jargon-free and non-intimidatory style and, in their different ways, take the reader through a logical progression from virtually zero assumed knowledge through to an adequate and attainable level of competence for the general physician. Both have excellent indices and glossaries. In a consumer test, from a sample of one (a candidate for the MRCP part 1) both were highly rated and were thought to be complementary rather than competing. However, given the propensity of medical students to read as few books as possible, the reviewer would opt for R.J. Trent as offering slightly better value and perhaps carrying greater customer appeal because of its stronger clinical orientation. The lucky student will have access to both!

C. MICHAEL STEEL
*University of St. Andrews
School of Biological and
Medical Sciences
Fife, KY16 9TS
Scotland*



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