

A Beginner's Guide to Blood Cells

Second edition. Barbara J. Bain. London: Blackwell, 2004.
ISBN 1-405-12175-0. 136 pp. £16.95 (illustrated paperback).

This compact book is easy to read and very clearly written and illustrated. As such, it represents the culmination of much experience in the field of blood morphology, and certainly Barbara Bain is a world-renowned doyen of this subject.

The book consists of five chapters. The first describes what a blood film is and how the cells within it should be counted. Here, red cell indices are defined in some detail and normal ranges are given, with an explanation of how these change with age and in relation to ethnic origin. Assessing red cells, the subject of the second chapter, is excellent, as is the third chapter on assessing white cells and platelets.

The only criticism I have of the book lies in the fourth chapter. Here, the haematological findings in health and disease are described and *further steps* to aid diagnosis are given. A variety of tests are suggested without any explanation of what these are for. Immunophenotyping, for example, is referred to on several occasions without an accompanying explanation of how this may in some cases be important in the diagnosis of, and prognosis for, certain leukaemias.

The French American British and the World Health Organization classifications of leukaemia are referred to, but not the more recent European Group for the Immunological Characterisation of Leukaemia or the British Task Force Recommendations.

The final chapter allows the reader to assess their knowledge and contains a number of exercises, multiple-choice questions and case studies. These would be challenging for any trainee in haematology. In conclusion, although it does not seek to be comprehensive, the book introduces the important basic concepts and sets haematological findings in a clinical context. □

M. G. Macey

Data Analysis and Presentational Skills

Jackie Willis. Chichester: Wiley, 2004.
ISBN 0-470-85274-7. 183 pp. £19.99.

This book has been written primarily to address the needs of undergraduate students in the medical and life sciences but it should also be of interest to anyone who is not familiar with the use of computers in the presentation of data. The initial chapter is of a very basic nature and presents an introduction to working in Windows. The author then deals with researching and planning projects and outlines the use of the internet as an information resource. Details of useful search engines and sites that can be accessed are presented and a section follows this on experimental design, which is also of a very basic nature.

There is a fairly detailed section on the use of Excel for collating data, preparing graphs, charts and tables, with clear examples of each type. The section on statistical analysis deals with the use of Excel in determining a number of statistical measurements (e.g., standard error of the mean,

frequency distributions and regression analysis). Examples are given, with data, for the application of various statistical methods. Finally, there is a brief section on presentational skills, which outlines the use of PowerPoint.

This is a useful basic textbook that introduces students to the use of computers in the design of projects and in the acquisition and analysis of data. The most comprehensive sections cover the analysis and presentation of scientific data. However, the sections on experimental design and presentational skills are quite superficial and thus students would need to augment the information given by the use of more comprehensive texts in these areas.

This is a reasonably priced book, presented in a user-friendly manner and should be very useful for students in the medical and life sciences. □

T. G. Scott

Moments of Truth: Four Creators of Modern Medicine

Thomas Dormandy. Chichester: Wiley, 2003.
ISBN 0-470-86321-8. 563 pp. £18.99.

Medicine from the mid-19th century was transformed into a science-based profession and many of the myths of the previous centuries were debunked. In this book, the author traces the scientific developments of medicine through the contributions of four individuals: Laennac, Semmelweis, Lister and Reed.

Theo Laennac was raised in France during the French Revolution. A very bright child and something of a literary prodigy, he considered becoming a poet before he took up medicine. He studied medicine at a turbulent time in French history but in Paris there pertained a more radical approach to diagnosis in which careful physical examination of the patient was undertaken and the belief that clinical signs should be linked to an underlying pathology. Laennac had a non-compromising nature. He had published many papers and reviewed books and articles, and, if he disagreed with the underlying tenets of the author he was unrelenting in his criticism. Thus, he was unpopular with many in his profession but eventually obtained a post in a small hospital and gradually built up a reputation as an excellent diagnostician and lecturer.

Auscultation (placing the ear to the patient's chest) was the method in use for physical examination for chest sounds at the time. During the course of examining a very stout female patient, Laennac found the method to be inadequate and, in considering a solution, rolled up some sheets of paper to make a cylinder and applied this to the patient's chest and heard distinct heart sounds. He called the method mediate auscultation. Laennac produced several advances on his first 'stethoscope' and applied this approach systematically in the physical examination of his patients.

He attempted to link his findings to the underlying pathology and published his findings. The correct recognition of bronchiectasis and pneumothorax arose from this work. Within just a few years the stethoscope was in use everywhere and today, almost 200 years later, Laennac's stethoscope, with some modification, is the primary clinical