REFERENCE TEXTBOOK FOR ACUTE PANCREATITIS

Dr Bradley has prepared a publication based on an international symposium on acute pancreatitis that was conducted in Atlanta in September 1992. Participants in that symposium were invited international authorities in multidisciplinary aspects of acute pancreatic disease. The contributions to that symposium have been organized in an effective format to deliver in-depth and current knowledge about all facets of acute pancreatitis and many of the complications.

This text is a high quality publication with extensive illustrations of radiographs, photomicrographs and clinical examples. Chapters are extensively tabled, and references are extensive throughout the seven sections. The organization of the publication flows smoothly from the introductory sections to the reviews of complications. A new feature in this presentation is an international perspective on the varying forms of acute pancreatic inflammation and a parallel introduction of regional preferences for therapies. Contributions from the disciplines of surgery, medicine, basic science and imaging give the reader a broad profile of the content of each section.

The first section, entitled 'Introduction to acute pancreatitis', deals with the pathogenesis of acute pancreatitis, and evaluates several of the stratification systems for prognosticating severity of acute pancreatitis. Although Bradley’s aim was to establish a clear classification of acute pancreatitis and its complications, one is left with the impression that clarity of definition is not feasible with the progression from severe pancreatitis through the variable septic complications.

In the second section, on severe acute pancreatitis, the contributors assign specific tools of evaluation (including serology, imaging and endoscopy) and then move smoothly through the spectrum of medical and surgical management with appropriate reviews of indications and effectiveness of noninterventional and interventional treatments. The third section reviews the severe form of pancreatitis from an international perspective.

The term ‘pancreatic abscess’ has created confusion and inappropriate therapy for many years. Section 4 attempts to define this complication of severe pancreatitis, and presents a separate section on percutaneous treatment by an interventional radiologist compared separately with open surgical management of this complication.

Having dealt with the severe forms of the disease and the relevant septic complications, the editor has chosen to focus the fifth section on 'pseudocysts' wherein contributions deal with epidemiology and pathology, and expectant therapy compared with percutaneous or surgical drainage. International contributions reflect the experience of managing pseudocysts in Australia, Japan and Sweden.

The final clinical section deals with the mild form of acute pancreatitis, and has appropriate contributions on the classical components of epidemiology, pathology, imaging and clinical diagnosis, and three sections on treatment and variations from international centres.

This excellent textbook should be of reference value to surgeons, gastroenterologists and interventional radiologists, and may be considered a reference text for all surgical resident libraries. I recommend it to any surgeon who has subspecialty interests in diseases of the pancreas and biliary tract. The contributors to this publication are recognized authorities in the field.

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IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE LIVER

Scanning electron microscopy, providing three-dimensional, close-up views of anatomy, revisits the renaissance quest of understanding function through a knowledge of structure. The resulting pictures are among the most beautiful in medicine. Al-