BOOK REVIEW

Immunology for life scientists. A basic introduction.

LESLEY-JANE EALES

*John Wiley & Sons Ltd., Chichester,
UK. 1997.*

This book is subtitled “A student-centred learning approach” so I was interested to find out how it would differ from more conventional – not to say “old fashioned” – products, given that immunology is already particularly well served by a range of excellent textbooks. In practice, “student centred” appears to mean that the introduction to each chapter is set out as “learning objectives”; each concludes with a paragraph of “learning outcomes” and further reading is suggested in the form of brief synopses of the content of selected original articles. The book also comes with its own self assessment programme on computer disk which consists of multiple choice questions, grouped by the chapters in which answers are to be found. All of this is user-friendly and many students will find the approach genuinely helpful. What is much more important, however, is the content and the effectiveness of its presentation.

Here, the book certainly has its strengths. The whole field is set out in a logical sequence, starting with the fundamental cellular and molecular processes and moving on to practical aspects of immunology, including transplantation, autoimmunity, the immunopathology of infection and immunodeficiency diseases. Most of the chapters are of non-intimidating length (12–20 pages) and all are liberally illustrated with line diagrams

that are uniform in style and admirably clear for some, but not all, purposes. The structure of surface receptors (apart from the unfortunate mislabelling of B cell surface Ig as the “T cell antigen receptor” in Fig. 3.4) and most examples of cellular interactions are helpfully portrayed but VDJ recombination in the generation of antibody diversity (Fig. 4.1) and several of the illustrations of complement activation are hard to follow. They might have benefited from the use of colour and, without it, the book has a somewhat Spartan appearance.

Although published in 1997, very little of the material is right up to date. None of the references are more recent than 1994 and this shows, for example, in the absence of any discussion of alternative surface receptors for HIV or of current approaches to the characterisation of tumour antigens. For a basic introduction to immunology, these are not fatal flaws and it certainly deserves promotion as a worthy, if slightly unimaginative, attempt to make the subject accessible to undergraduates in the life sciences. In the spirit of market research, I passed my review copy to two potential customers whose views are appended below.

*Michael Steel
Professor in Medical Sciences,
University of St. Andrews
UK*

Student opinion:

Our overall view of this book is that it is comprehensive, readable but a bit dull. On the plus side, it emphasises the basics,

highlights key words and specifies learning objectives and outcomes so that the student has a clear idea of what he/she ought to know. There are plenty of diagrams. We like the brief abstract of each paper/book in the further reading list. The self assessment pack is useful for revision and the book itself is conveniently portable. It uses English spelling, which we appreciate but which many not endear it to our transatlantic counterparts.

The negative points include the absence of colour pictures or good photographs, (histological preparations or electron micrographs, for example). As a result, the appearance does not inspire the reader. Self assessment questions at the end of chapters would be more useful than a

statement of learning outcomes. It is not always possible to go straight to a computer to find out how much you have learned. It would also be more helpful to group references for further reading at the end of each chapter rather than all together at the end of the book. Finally, the computer disk is in PC format. If your university (like ours) is equipped mainly with Mac's, this can be inconvenient.

If this book were republished with colour diagrams and photographs we would certainly recommend it to other students.

*Lucy Sparks, Margaret Rogers-Bald
Final year honours students in
Biological Sciences
University of St. Andrews*