

Toxoplasmosis: a comprehensive clinical guide

Eds: Joynson DHM, Wreghitt TG

Cambridge University Press, The Edinburgh Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 2RU, United Kingdom
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Toxoplasma gondii is one of the most successful parasites in the world, due to the development of a complex biological relationship with man. In the past, toxoplasmosis has been a common but often neglected infection. The disease has, however, aroused attention in the past 2 decades as an emerging infection that causes significant morbidity and mortality in patients with HIV infection and AIDS. Its importance in the causation of congenital abnormalities has now been recognised.

This book is a comprehensive clinical guide to toxoplasmosis, written by a team of experts from different disciplines under the editorship of two prominent authorities in the field. Starting with an interesting historical perspective, the book is divided into 14 chapters and four appendices. After a masterly in-depth account of the bio-immunological and epidemiological background of toxoplasmosis, there is a detailed description of the infection in immunocompetent, HIV-infected, and immunosuppressed (HIV-negative) patients. Four chapters are devoted to infection of the mother and child (foetus, neonate, and infant) and screening in the prenatal and postnatal periods. Finally, the book ends with the inclusion of ocular infection, laboratory diagnosis, anti-toxoplasma chemotherapy, and vaccines.

One obvious feature of this book is the discussion on laboratory diagnosis and chemotherapy at the end. These aspects have been deliberated in various circumstances in the preceding chapters. There are invariably areas of repetition and overlap in this approach. Whether this is detrimental to easy reading of the book is contentious. My view is that these two chapters might better serve as an overview and a summary, and this can be achieved by simplification of the contents and cross references to the materials that have appeared earlier. Immunotherapy with interferon- γ

and interleukin-12 as an adjunctive treatment for patients with AIDS who are severely immunocompromised might preferably have been discussed in some detail in an advanced work of this calibre.

The use of prophylactic anti-convulsant medicines is not recommended in the chapter on toxoplasmic encephalitis. The author should have also mentioned that anti-convulsants are sometimes necessary for the treatment of seizures and attention should have been drawn to the potential interaction between sulphadiazine and phenytoin. The chapter on vaccines aims to show the way forward by providing the theoretical basis and reporting on the experimental studies. However, it is a disappointment for clinicians as no clinical application has yet been identified. No vaccine is available for humans and there is not likely to be one in the foreseeable future.

Despite these comments, I think this book is superbly written and the style is consistent owing to the efforts of the editors. It is highly readable and the factual information is accurate. Its place as a major textbook on toxoplasmosis is going to be well established. This book should be the standard reference for infectious disease physicians, microbiologists, and practitioners of related specialties, for example, haematological oncologists, transplant specialists, and obstetricians. Although not everyone would want to own a copy, the text deserves a place on the shelf of departmental or institutional libraries.

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Alloimmune disorders of pregnancy: anaemia, thrombocytopenia, and neutropenia in the foetus and neonate

Eds: Hadley AG, Soothill P

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To many obstetricians and paediatricians in Hong Kong, problems such as rhesus isoimmunisation and haemolytic

disease of the foetus and neonate are so rarely encountered in clinical practice that there is little need to remember the

diagnosis and management unless they are taking examinations. Other conditions such as alloimmune thrombocytopenia and neutropenia are almost never encountered. Nevertheless, these conditions, collectively known as the alloimmune cytopenias, may still cause serious perinatal morbidity and even mortality. Rhesus isoimmunisation occurs more frequently in northern Chinese and some non-Chinese Asian people. Furthermore, maternal immunisation to foetal blood cells, including red cells, white cells, and platelets, occurs in all ethnic groups, even though many cases have probably been overlooked. Increasing awareness of these conditions, together with the changing ethnic composition in Hong Kong, could well lead to a rise in the diagnosis of these conditions in the future.

Since the management of these conditions is unfamiliar to most doctors practising in Hong Kong, the recent publication of the book titled *Alloimmune disorders of pregnancy: anaemia, thrombocytopenia, and neutropenia in the foetus and neonate* edited by Dr Hadley and Professor Soothill will provide a useful and handy reference. Since the effective prevention, diagnosis, and management of these disorders require nothing less than the combined efforts of obstetricians, paediatricians, haematologists, pathologists, and laboratory staff, this book will be suitable for all these specialists. This book will also be a most welcome addition to the departmental libraries of the specialists involved in the management of these patients.

Beginning with the pathophysiology of the alloimmune cytopenias, the book then examines in detail the various aspects of haemolytic diseases of the foetus and newborn and maternal RhD alloimmunisation, alloimmune thrombocytopenia, and alloimmune neutropenia. In addition to the clinical perspectives, comprehensive information is given by the many expert contributors on laboratory methods, including molecular biology and genetics. The content is accurate and up-to-date. One example is the comprehensive discussion on the epidemiology and screening for alloimmune thrombocytopenia. This can be taken

as a clinical guideline, and may also help in medicolegal situations. The chapter on alloimmune neutropenia is particularly enlightening since so little is known about this condition, which tends to be underdiagnosed. Even clinicians not closely involved with the management of patients with alloimmune cytopenias can obtain helpful information on other situations. For instance, one can get a clear idea of the various red cell alloantibodies and the screening tests in antenatal determination of maternal blood group and cross-matching from Chapter 3. The method for the calculation of the size of foeto-maternal haemorrhage can be found in Chapter 6. Thus, this is a practical book.

Each chapter in this book comprises a number of sections that are precise and concise, being written in the form of expanded notes that is so beloved by local doctors. The chapters are also well referenced. Some readers may find the book too 'matter-of-fact', and that the chapters are not particularly well illustrated. I find the illustrations appropriate, however, and the chapters are easy to read even for clinicians with little laboratory background. For busy trainees and specialists alike, who have to prepare for presentations, examinations, or patient management, this book provides a user-friendly and helpful source of reference.

In conclusion, this book is well presented and contains the latest clinical and research data. It is definitely worth acquiring by all involved departments for their libraries. For individuals who treat patients with alloimmune cytopenias and those who have a strong quest for knowledge that is not readily available from the usual sources, this book belongs to the must-buy category.

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Epidemiological studies: a practical guide, second edition

By: Silman AJ, Macfarlane GJ

Cambridge University Press, The Edinburgh Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 2RU, United Kingdom
GB£21.95, pp 256, ISBN 0 521 00939 1 (paperback); GB£65.00, ISBN 0 521 81097 3 (hardback)

This book takes a holistic approach to the subject of epidemiology, aiming to be a practical guidebook for post-graduate students in public health and epidemiology. The book includes an introduction to epidemiological methods, practical issues in conducting studies, data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and also contains two useful chapters on ethical and cost issues. The presentation is simple and straightforward, and it is easy-to-read for

those with some background training in epidemiology and biostatistics. The book may pose difficulties for the novice, however, and the content may not be easily comprehended by clinicians, as the authors have presented a large amount of material concisely in a slim text of 236 pages.

Examples of specific content include 'age-period-cohort models', misclassifications in ecological studies, and