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## Book reviews

A. Stewart Truswell. *ABC of Nutrition*, 4th ed. London: BMJ Books 2003. £19.95 (paperback). pp. 152. ISBN 0 7279 1664 5

This work was originally written as a series of articles for the *BMJ*. Its original aims were to inform general practitioners and encourage them to consider nutrition issues in their practice. One reason for this was the lack of nutrition taught within the undergraduate medical curriculum. This edition continues to fulfil these aims incorporating recent developments, providing an interesting and easy-to-read book. To have summarised such a vast area in 140 pages is a major achievement and any omissions are entirely forgivable. As the author says in the preface: 'This is the ABC of nutrition, not the XYZ'. Hopefully since the first edition the target audience has expanded to cover other healthcare professionals, especially nurses, who have similar curriculum constraints. With the increasing importance of team-working, community nurses (primary-care nurses and health visitors) are being frequently asked to give nutritional advice and would benefit from reading this book. One slight criticism of this volume is that the role of dietitians is not discussed; indeed they are rarely mentioned. This is unfortunate, as the dietitian's role should also encompass not only patient advice but also education of doctors and other healthcare professionals in the area of nutrition.

While it is understood that the book was originally written as separate papers it would benefit from links between the chapters. For example, diabetes mellitus is not mentioned in the chapters on CHD or hypertension, yet they are related. It may have been useful to draw the reader's attention to the National Service Frameworks and their role in delivering nutrition targets. The book is a mixture of summaries of the evidence, with clear conclusions in some chapters, with very practical advice in others. The chapter on infant feeding in particular offers good practical advice. This inconsistency may be confusing to the reader who would expect the approach to be consistent across the text. Information on the role of infant feeding in the development of allergy and intolerances would have been beneficial as this is an area doctors and health visitors should be able to offer advice on. Again links with this chapter and the chapter on food sensitivity would have been advantageous.

Probably due to this reviewer's own interest, the chapter on measuring nutritional status appears neither comprehensive nor completely up to date. General practitioners would probably find a section on the physical assessment of nutritional status informative and useful. It is good to see instructions on weight measurement, but height measurement is equally important and is frequently performed incorrectly. The chapter on nutritional support brings together many important issues, but the area of nutritional

screening is covered only scantily. The screening tool detailed in a table is dated 1995 and many validated tools are now available.

While this book is not aimed at nutrition or dietetic students it does provide good summaries of various topics for undergraduates, which should then be studied further. Unfortunately the nutrition content of the medical curriculum does not appear to have changed significantly and there is still the need for a book of this nature. This book remains a valuable text for all medical practitioners.

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Susan A. New and Jean-Philippe Bonjour (editors). *Nutritional Aspects of Bone Health*. Cambridge: Royal Society of Chemistry 2003. £49.95 (paperback). pp. 734. ISBN 0 85404 585 6

All physiological systems are profoundly influenced by nutrition and the skeleton is no exception. These effects begin *in utero* and continue throughout life; stunting of growth is commonly seen in malnourished children and a variety of bone diseases arises from nutritional deficiencies (or excess). In the case of osteoporosis, the most common bone disease, nutritional policies have the potential to improve bone health in the general population and reduce the enormous impact on the elderly population of fragility fractures. Although Ca and vitamin D are the nutrients classically associated with bone, many other, less-well-recognised, dietary constituents also have significant effects. Furthermore, there are important, albeit poorly understood, interactions between nutritional, genetic and other factors that influence skeletal health.

In *Nutritional Aspects of Bone Health*, Susan New and Jean-Philippe Bonjour have produced a comprehensive overview that brings together the sometimes-disparate topics of nutrition and bone. There are six sections and thirty-two chapters in this book: the first section covers some general aspects of osteoporosis, rickets and osteomalacia; the second is devoted to Ca and vitamin D; the third addresses the effects of protein, Na, K and P on bone. This is followed by a discussion of the influences on bone of a number of nutrients including vitamin K, vitamin A, trace elements, Mg and isoflavones. Topics in the fifth section

include the effects of weight loss, pregnancy and lactation on bone health and the book concludes with a discussion of the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of nutritional strategies targeted either at high-risk groups or the general population.

This book is a mine of information; some expected, some unexpected. One of its many attractions is the eclecticism of topics; for example, there are chapters on nutrition and bone health in Middle Eastern women and in the Asian population, and on the effect of mineral waters on bone metabolism and bone health. The area of the detrimental skeletal effects of dietary acid and benefits of fruits and vegetables is covered in some detail, and the recently proposed relationship between vitamin A and fracture risk is reviewed. The authorship of the book is truly international and many of the authors are world leaders in their field.

The target audience for this book is potentially large and includes undergraduates, dietitians, nutritionists, and all healthcare professionals involved in the management of osteoporosis. In addition, many scientists with an interest in bone and/or nutrition would find this book of interest and value, since scientific aspects of many of the topics are covered in some depth. The chapters are generously referenced and the key points and short conclusions at the beginning and end respectively of each chapter provide useful summaries. Unfortunately, reproduction of some of the figures is not of a high quality (including some x-rays) and this should be addressed in subsequent editions.

Drs New and Bonjour are to be congratulated on producing a book that so successfully integrates bone and nutrition and provides such wide coverage of the relevant topics. In terms of its contents and breadth, the book is unique and fills an important existing gap in textbook literature. Although research into nutritional influences on bone health has lagged behind that of other topics related to bone disease, this book demonstrates the progress that has been made in recent years. With the exception of Ca and vitamin D supplementation, most of the nutrients discussed have not yet impacted on clinical practice but their potential to improve bone health is an exciting area for future research. The book is dedicated to Linda Edwards, late Director of the National Osteoporosis Society, who did so much to raise the public profile of osteoporosis and to help those with the disease. She would undoubtedly have approved.

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