

# BOOK FORUM

PULMONARY MEDICINE

**Bronchial Asthma**, edited by EB Weiss, et al. Little, Brown and Company, Boston/Toronto, 1985, \$99, 982 pp

It has always been difficult to write or edit the definitive book on asthma because so many unknowns about this disorder remain to be unraveled and a steady stream of new information quickly "dulls the cutting edge" of any newly published textbook on this topic. With these limitations in mind, the recently released second edition of *Bronchial Asthma, Mechanisms and Therapeutics* edited by E. B. Weiss, M. S. Segal and M. Stein, clearly qualifies as the foremost comprehensive survey of this vast and complex subject.

This new edition is much more than an update of the original 1976 publication. Much of the book has been revamped, with close to 100 new contributing authors, 40 new chapters, and 20 "old" chapters with completely new authorship. The book has been streamlined to 982 pages, and the print is easier to read than in the first edition. The basic distribution of contents remains the same: mechanisms of asthma (26 chapters), followed by diagnostic and laboratory considerations (23 chapters), and closing with therapy and patient management (31 chap-

ters).

All the chapters are supported by a thorough and reasonably up-to-date bibliography; there are, however, few if any references later than 1983 (copyright date of the book is 1985). The most exhaustive reviews include chapter 8 on Biochemical Mediators: Release, Chemistry and Function with 511 references, and the chapters on Experimental Asthma in Animals, and Occupational Asthma, with 350 and 347 references, respectively.

Most of the chapters are illustrated by a sufficient number of pertinent, clear, and easily read figures and tables. Nonetheless a few colored, glossy prints on the pathology and sputum findings in asthma would have enhanced these topics.

As in any book with more than one author, a certain amount of overlap of material is to be expected; this is mostly a positive aspect of this book because overlap is not excessive and material in one chapter reinforces similar but somewhat differently presented material in others. The abundance of excellent chapters prohibits specific comments on each of them. Particularly noteworthy, however, are the chapters on Immunologic Mechanisms and Recent Advances in Asthma, by Ross

Rocklin and Steven R. Findlay; Airway Smooth Muscle: Physiology, Bronchomotor Tone, Pharmacology and Relation to Asthma, by Newman L. Stephens; Bronchial Mucus in Asthma, by Maria Teresa Lopez-Vidriero and Lynne M. Reid; Bronchial Provocation Tests, by Sheldon Spector; and Alpha and Beta Adrenergic Agents, by Donald P. Tashkin and John W. Jeanne.

A few shortcomings, however, exist in the book; for example, the failure of Fischl to discuss several papers that question the value of her predictor index for evaluating acute asthma (however, these papers appeared in 1984 and may have missed the publication cutoff date). This book should be read by all adult and pediatric pulmonologists and allergists, and probably by any physician with a strong interest in asthma. In addition, this book will serve as a reference book for any medical student, medical house officer or practicing physician who needs an update on some aspect of asthma. It is to be hoped that the editors are already planning a third edition in the early to mid 1990s so that their book remains the standard text on this important topic.

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