

Woolf, N. Pathology: Basic and Systemic. London: W. B. Saunders; 1998. 1281 pages; ISBN 0-7020-2291-8

Nowadays even small-size medical libraries have not only several general pathology textbooks, but also several books on special fields of pathology. Knowing that, I believe it must be hard to write a pathology book. It must be even harder to write a book that will be somehow different from all the others. It is always a pleasure to read and review such a book.

The author of the "Pathology: basic and systemic", Neville Woolf, MD, PhD, is Vice-Dean and Faculty Tutor at the University College Medical School, London (UK), a former Bland-Sutton Professor of Histopathology, with over 40 years' experience in teaching medical students.

Written in an easy-to-read English, the book has 46 chapters, organized in two parts usually found in pathology textbooks: basic and systemic pathology. There are over 420 color photographs of human tissues, 460 original full-color illustrations, and 350 tables.

The preface defines the pathology as a fundamental discipline for all health care professionals and as a bridge between basic medical sciences and the practice of medicine. It also gives guidelines to help medical students understand the importance of events at the tissue, cellular, and sub-cellular level, as well as how to connect those events with the symptoms of his/her patient. Also, the pathology teachers will find important advice on how to teach their students to "think pathology".

The first part of the book, basic pathology reviews in 31 chapters the normal physiological background and cell behavior, and introduces basic concepts of pathology. It deals with cell injury and manifestations, acute and chronic inflammation, the immune system, general mechanisms of infectious diseases, disorders of blood flow, principles of neoplastic disorders and oncogenesis, and genetic disorders.

Systemic pathology, the second part of the book, presents in 15 chapters the essentials of the pathology of the organ systems. Each section usually begins with the review of anatomy and physiology. Beside the discussion on macroscopic and microscopic features of a particular disease, each section deals with the epidemiology and risk factors, pathogenesis, pathological and pathophysiological mechanisms, and clinical considerations.

Phrases and key words are printed in bold throughout the text. Essential concepts, macroscopic, and microscopic features are printed in colored text boxes, which are easy to find. Pathological features are illustrated with many color photographs. Important data are summarized in tables and many diagrams and schemes help the reader to understand and memorize the facts.

Environmental and nutritional diseases, as well as the diseases of infancy and childhood are not organized in separate chapters, but some of the conditions from those groups are included elsewhere in the book. Dental and oral pathology is not discussed, probably in order to keep the book concise.

However, there is an excellent chapter on the pathology of special senses (the eye and the ear). The chapters on the central nervous system and the skin include useful glossaries of pathological terms.

I presume that the majority of the Croatian Medical Journal readers know of the textbook written by Robbins et al (1). For its excellence, it is widely recognized as one of the best pathology textbooks.

However, although Woolf's "Pathology" is not so full of details, it might have a few advantages: important information is highlighted, detailed descriptions and photographs of macroscopic pathological features are included, and its literally full of colors, schemes and pictures.

Woolf's "Pathology" is a very fine, reader-friendly textbook that can be cordially recommended to all medical students. It can not only help them pass their exam but also make a connection between "dull" facts about pathological changes of cells and tissues with the signs and symptoms of their patients. It can help them understand the "essence" of diseases themselves and, consequently, become better physicians. Also, it may be a useful aid to physicians to refresh their knowledge and to keep up with the latest information. Last but not least, it can help pathology teachers present their knowledge to medical students and show them that pathology is not merely a huge amount of boring data.

1 Cotran RS, Kumar V, Robbins SL. Pathologic basis of disease. 6th ed. Philadelphia (PA): W. B. Saunders Company; 1999.

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