Book Review—Diagnostic pathology: gastrointestinal, 2nd edition

Fred T. Bosman¹

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The fact that the 2nd edition of this volume appeared just 5 years after the 1st is an eloquent testimony of its success. It rapidly became a favorite among trainees, general pathologists, and specialized GI pathologists. Ease of use in daily diagnostic practice, the quality of the information, and the support of excellent quality and well-chosen images have contributed to its success. All this has even improved in the 2nd edition.

Before writing “volume” I hesitated between “textbook” and “atlas.” There is a good amount of text in the book but it is not a textbook in the strict sense of the term. The text consists invariably of brief statements arranged in a table-like structure with bullet points. There is little reasoning; everything seems clear-cut and straightforward almost as if doubt is no longer necessary. References are lavish and well selected but do not refer to specific issues in the text. The volume contains a huge number of very well chosen images which makes for an atlas-like impression. But with the amount of text, the book obviously goes way beyond what an atlas would offer. In the preface, the lead author, Joel Greenson, states “The goal is to provide quick, up-to-date information on gastro-intestinal pathologyto either help the pathologist to arrive at the correct diagnosis or refresh his or her memory about the diagnosis itself.” The team of authors has indeed done an excellent job in attaining this goal. With the well-structured layout, subjects are easy to find and the relevant information is presented in brief crystal-clear terms. The e-book version online makes finding

what you are looking for even easier and comes with additional images of superb quality that support key points made in the text.

No critique then? There is one conceptual issue. I like to tell advanced trainees that pathology is not what is in textbooks. Textbooks are tools that help us to approach what we encounter in daily practice in a structured way. Reality is (fortunately) more complex: just imagine that the biology of disease would hold no more secrets. Life would become boring! And yet, this book makes the impression that everything is “solved”; no more controversy. This is probably unavoidable with the format chosen. A second issue is the way molecular analyses are incorporated in the text. The information on the back cover states “... and the molecular biology of GI tract tumours as it relates to precision medicine and targeted therapy.” And yet, as an example, information on KRAS testing in colorectal cancer is not easy to find (KRAS is not in the index and neither is EGFR). It is in a sub-bullet under treatment/adjunct therapy (even though targeted treatment concerns primarily stage IV colorectal cancer) and it is not even listed under ancillary tests! My hunch is that in the 3rd edition the molecular dimension in a precision medicine context will figure more prominently.

These comments should be taken as suggestions for the future rather than objections. For all those practitioners confronted daily with GI pathology, this is an invaluable tool, which should be within reach right next to the (virtual) microscope. Highly recommended!

✉ Fred T. Bosman
fred.bosman@citycable.ch

¹ Institute of Pathology, University Medical Center (CHUV) of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

Joel K. Greenson (Ed.)

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