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## *Book review*

**R. Williams (ed) Liver failure.** Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh Harlem New York 1986. 43 figures, pp 230, £ 24. ISBN 0443031096

The management of patients with acute and chronic liver failure can be frustrated by lack of understanding of the multiple problems. The literature is full of many theories explaining observed changes. However when these theories are used to determine apparently rational treatment the results are frequently unrewarding. It is very timely that Dr. Williams should produce this book in which he has collected together a series of monographs by international experts where each reviews the current state of the art of management of the various complications of liver failure. Together they have produced a masterly overview of the current facts and theories. Some of the sections represent a constructive overview culminating in sound advice from the reviewer by way of interpretation of the data presented. Others serve more as a forum for the authors to present their own experimental data. These findings are interesting but do not contribute to the management of patients with the problems in question. As a surgeon with an interest in managing patients with complex hepatobiliary problems, I found the chapters on cerebral oedema, cardiopulmonary disturbances, hepatic nephropathy and liver failure related infections particularly interesting since they contained data new to me and some examples of the successful rational

application of knowledge to the clinical situation. Patients in an intensive care unit frequently develop multiple organ failure and organ support is needed. Thus much of the information in this book is very pertinent for Intensive Care doctors. Certainly I think they would find the chapters in the first half of the book extremely helpful for some of the phenomena commonly seen in patients with liver failure are analysed and there are rational explanations for the resistance shown to therapy by some of these patients. Furthermore it clearly demonstrated that there are many aspects of liver disease which we do not understand; the field is wide open for more studies. After I had read this book and reflected on its contents I was disappointed that there were no magic recipes for treating these seriously ill patients but such is the nature of liver failure. The one conclusion that is evident is that when patients start to suffer from these complex problems there is no place for amateur management. It is essential to recognise the warning signs and to solicit the help of a hepatologist. In summary I think that this should be mandatory reading for doctors seriously involved in major intensive care medicine. They will be appraised of proven therapy in the difficult field of liver failure and made aware of the current lines of research, the outcome of which hopefully will allow us to improve the therapy we offer our patients in the future.

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