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BOOK REVIEW

Heike Allgayer, Helga Rehder and Simone Fulda: Hereditary tumours: from genes to clinical consequences

Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, HB, 530 p, £115, ISBN 978-3-527-32028-8

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This multi-author book aims to summarize molecular, diagnostic and therapeutic aspects of hereditary tumour diseases. Most of the book consists of chapters devoted to specific types of tumour and the range covered is broad. All the common cancer sites are covered including the breast, the ovary and the gastrointestinal tract. Additionally, topics often not covered comprehensively in comparable texts are included, such as paediatric and haematological cancers and the tumours associated with conditions traditionally considered as dysmorphic syndromes.

The book's stated target audience is broad, including medical students, laboratory scientists and clinicians in a range of medical specialities. My initial concern was that this 'one glove fits all approach' may not meet differing needs of such diverse groups and after reading the text it seems really to have been written for a more restricted audience, namely clinicians who manage patients with an inherited risk of cancer. Perhaps this is a reflection of the perspectives of the authors, most of whom are practising clinicians.

The emphasis on molecular and clinical aspects varies between chapters. Writing from the perspective of a clinical cancer geneticist, the best chapters not only provide an overview of the topic, but also provide pragmatic advice on clinical aspects, suggestive of the authors' familiarity with day to day practice in the field. A number of chapters provide sample pedigrees which helps put dry lists of diagnostic criteria in the context of clinical scenarios which clinicians encounter. Historically the areas of cancer genetics which have been best established relate to disease definitions, descriptions of clinical features and an understanding of underlying molecular mechanisms. Evidence based management and rational targeting of therapeutic agents are more recent developments and this is reflected in the book. Each chapter adequately describes molecular aspects and clinical manifestations but in general management issues such as patient selection, diagnostic assessment and therapeutic intervention are less well addressed.

The book is topped and tailed by chapters addressing general aspects. The discussions on genetic counselling and psychological issues are interesting and relevant. The discussion of the basic genetics of inherited cancer provides a useful introduction for someone new to the field. A couple of these general chapters are too focused, providing detailed molecular descriptions of very specific topics which seem out of keeping with the rest of the text.

For the all but the most motivated medical student this book provides everything and, perhaps, more than they would want to know about cancer genetics. For a laboratory scientist, highly focussed on one or two particular areas, the book provides an overview of the field; its clinical slant may give an additional perspective and the level of molecular details is sufficient to provide a starting point for further reading. From a personal point of view, I would have liked to see more detail regarding patient management but for a clinician seeking either an overview of cancer genetics or a reference book when an uncommonly encountered condition presents this book is to be recommended.

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