

Book reviews

A.S. Truswell, ABC of nutrition, 2nd edition, British Medical Journal, London, 1992

Nutrition is a vast subject and to reduce it to its ABC is likely to be misleadingly simplistic. How then is it possible to have a book of 106 pages of the undoubted quality of the present volume? For one, it has a focus which is clinical, whilst taking account of basic nutritional science and acknowledging a number of public health issues in developing and industrialized countries. Then, it is selective for the major clinical nutrition problems which are non-communicable in the developed and transitional worlds — obesity, cardiovascular disease diabetes, cancer and cirrhosis; it covers the physiological stages of life; it describes measurement in nutrition; it has several chapters on food, including its technology; and has an excellent concluding 18th chapter on principles.

It paves the way, but does not canvass the rapid changes in food supply and health which are imminent and consequent on ecosystem destruction, urbanization, genetic engineering of food and molecular biology in medical management, and on the development of "functional" or medical foods by the new smart food technology. Nutrition in medicine will be profoundly changed in the foreseeable future, but then there must be a third edition!

Professor Truswell has an encyclopaedic knowledge of food, nutrition and health and this is reflected in this succinct book, drawn originally from the papers of the British Medical Journal, which achieves depth from A to Z.

Mark L. Wahlqvist

Jean Vague, Obesity, John Libbey & Co/Editions Solal

This book is destined to be a classic because of its author and its content. In the late 1940s in the French medical literature (Press Med 1947; 55:339–340. 1949; 57:556–557 and 835–837) Jean Vague drew attention to the differences in distribution of fat usually seen in men and women and their health implications. Artists and writers had, for generations, been commentators, but none so focal for medicine as Vague. His work on fat distribution has been for obesity research what the appreciation of dietary fibre by Trowell and Burkitt was for food-health research. In his footsteps have followed Per Björntorp and Ulf Smith and a growing number of researchers. The book goes well beyond the android and gynoid classification of obesity, and develops an understanding of immediate or combined types as well as development of fat distribution and its change with age. Additionally, there is a chapter on dystrophic obesity, including ethnic steatopygia and lipomatosis. The pathogenesis and clinical outcomes of fat maldistribution are considered. Most difficult is the question of management, since we do not yet have satisfactorily selective approaches for defining obesity type nor appropriate evaluation of changed morbidity or mortality. But as a basis for future work and a history of the subject, this book could hardly be bettered.

Mark L. Wahlqvist