

Book Review

Pathology of the Breast

By Fattaneh A Tavassoli. Norwalk, Appleton and Lange, 1993.
 ISBN-8385 7702 4. £154.50.

FOR ANYONE looking for a really comprehensive account of lesions of the breast this book is hard to beat. From choristoma to choriocarcinomatous carcinoma, it is there. Not only is nearly every lesion ever described in the breast included, but the author also highlights some previously underdescribed features that are sometimes encountered, particularly in benign breast lesions.

Perhaps the most outstanding features of the book, however, are the photomicrographs. The clarity of the pictures of both light and electron microscopy are unparalleled and will, I am sure, be the envy of many. The only disadvantage is that, due to the very large number, they sometimes get widely separated from the relevant text which is rather irritating to the reader, but is a small price to pay in view of the excellence of the pictures.

The book is well set out, beginning with a valuable chapter on development of the breast and developmental abnormalities. This is followed by an extensive chapter on general considerations, including epidemiology, with mention of risk factors and prognostic features. A detailed table is given of TNM staging. There is also extensive discussion of tumour grading, with reference to modifications published by both Contesso and colleagues and, more recently, by Elston and associates. In addition, there is a paragraph on the Nottingham prognostic index. It is refreshing to see so many European references in a book from across the Atlantic. It is also encouraging to note, in the section on ancillary prognosticators' the comment that "regardless of the current enthusiasm concerning the variety of monoclonal antibodies (available), it is important to maintain a healthy scepticism". There is a useful chapter by Stewart Schnitt on the gross handling of breast specimens. The arrangement of chapters dealing with epithelial lesions, biphasic tumours, mesenchymal lesions and diseases of the nipple is well thought out. The author's views on the differential diagnosis of hyperplastic epithelial lesions are clear, and it is useful to read a detailed account of the criteria she employs for the diagnosis of atypical ductal hyperplasia. Interesting historical details are included in many of the chapters as well as an outline of the behaviour and treatment of most lesions.

Another excellent aspect of the book is the detailed references given at the end of each chapter which are divided into individual topics and are, therefore, easy to find. The addition of asterisks

to denote papers which are themselves good sources of further references is also extremely useful.

There are, inevitably, in a book of this size, criticisms. In some aspects the text is inconsistent. Whilst, on many occasions, the author makes her opinions clear, on others the discussions appear circuitous and results of conflicting papers are presented without any attempt at collation or conclusion. Elsewhere no mention is made of conflicting views, for example, the opposing findings in studies correlating the phase of menstrual cycle with proliferative activity in normal breast epithelium. The current controversies regarding the prognosis and interobserver reproducibility in the diagnosis of medullary carcinoma receive no mention. I would also disagree with some of the author's more personal views. The use of the term fibroadenoma phyllodes for a hypocellular fibroadenoma with a prominent intracanalicular pattern might be acceptable if it were not equated with the term low-grade phyllodes tumour. This will inevitably lead to an overdiagnosis of phyllodes tumours and, thus, possible overtreatment of innocent fibroadenomas. A similar worry is attached to the recommendation for the management of atypical ductal hyperplasia where follow-up with examination two to three times a year appears somewhat excessive.

Much of the book reflects the author's practice with its emphasis on problem referral cases. There are detailed descriptions, often with personal accounts, of many of the rarer lesions whilst some entities, more commonly encountered in day-to-day histological practice, receive less attention. For example, radial scars receive only a relatively brief mention, although these lesions are an important component of screen-detected lesions. Indeed, the role of mammography in detection of breast lesions is rather underemphasised in this book. There are very few mammographic pictures and mention of mammographic features is not consistently given for all appropriate lesions.

On balance, however, this is a well-constructed, comprehensive book on breast pathology. It is worth buying for the pictures alone. Although it may not be the first book of reference one reaches for in day-to-day problem solving, it is certainly a book which should be purchased by anyone with an interest in breast histopathology.

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