

### Book review

## Instant Notes: Immunology (Second Edition)

By Peter M Lydyard, Alex Whelan and Michael W Fanger

332 pp., Bios/Taylor & Francis, New York and Abingdon, 2004, ISBN 1-8599-6039-1, £18.99

The *Instant Notes Study Guides*, which now exist for a range of bioscience subjects, seem to have been successful and the format is appreciated by students. The present volume is that for Immunology and is written by one British, one Irish and one American author (at least according to their affiliations). “Instant” means that information is presented in ‘bite-sized’ portions that a student could easily read (and hopefully digest) at a sitting. This might be to amplify lecture material or to prepare for an examination. Each ‘Section’, effectively a chapter (although they are not called chapters) offers perhaps 6 sub-sections, and each of these presents “Key Notes” with a few sentences/definitions on each of several words or phrases. The second edition is updated and extended with more figures and tables, and has additional sections on ageing and gender. In fact *Immunology* is more like a regular textbook than typical members of the *Instant Notes* series.

The sequence of topics is given below, although the book does not necessarily have to be read in a linear sequence (and students don’t do this anyway). At the end of each ‘Key Notes’ section there is a helpful list of “Related topics” that the student can skip to or be guided to. In a way this is sensible. In most disciplines there is always an argument about what should be taught first and in any case students skip around to things that help them to understand or are of more immediate interest. The sequence is: overview, the cells and molecules of the innate immune system, the adaptive immune system, antibodies, the antibody response, the T-cell response – cell-mediated immunity, regulation of the immune response, immunity to infection, vaccination, immunodeficiency, hypersensitivity, autoimmunity, transplantation, tumour immunology, gender and the immune system, ageing and the immune system. At the end there are, in addition to Further Readings, 125 multiple-choice questions (in NBME format, one from four) with answers, two Appendices one on the CD molecules and one on the principal cytokines, and there is also a Glossary. This is a substantial book despite the impression that “instant” might be taken to mean “highly condensed for immediate memorization”.

I found the text a little dry to read but thought that the coverage was quite extensive although there might have been more about the complement system (not strictly part of the immune system I suppose), and I couldn’t find anything about ABO haemolytic disease or multiple myeloma. This is a pity since much of our knowledge about antibodies came from studying sera from myeloma patients. Some of the Tables were unhelpful (e.g. Table 1 in the very

first section) and some were too complicated to be useful (e.g. Tables 1 and 2 in the complement section, p.25). There are a few instances of poor style that might lead to misunderstanding. Thus on p.169, "Inhibition of cytokines" actually means inhibition of the *production* of cytokines. There is indeed quite a lot that doesn't quite connect (but immunology is a big topic area and this may be inevitable). It is not because this is a short text – this is a substantial immunology textbook

So overall, the concept of partially digested "Notes" such as these seems to be welcomed by students whose main aim is to pass the examination. Whether we really want them simply to remember information in as concise a form as possible or whether we want them to be able to do other things is something that this type of text does not wish to address. Presumably the ability to find and critically appraise information in the current literature comes later in the degree course. The book would be useful to students on both immunology courses and biochemistry courses. Medical students would also be interested but there are probably more appropriate books for medics with more (relevant) medical examples described in greater detail.

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