

Book Review

Instant Notes: Medical Microbiology

By W. Irving, D. Ala'aldeen, and T. Boswell

350 pp., Bios/Taylor & Francis, 2005, ISBN 1-85996-254-8, GBP18.99

“Medical Microbiology” is a new addition to the *Instant Notes* series and although the logic, like that of previous books in the series is to present the information in bite-sized chunks, not necessarily expecting students to start at the beginning and read through, it is still a sizeable volume. This is probably inevitable considering the size of the subject, although one has to say that the whole of Biochemistry fits into 438 pages (but not including Molecular Biology which occupies a separate volume). I suppose this indicates that authors have been given a fairly free remit to express what they think their subject encompasses at the present time. The current authors say that students may find that medical microbiology to be an intimidating subject with a language of its own, covering a range from the molecular biology of infectious agents to the clinical consequences, as well as diagnosis and management. Therefore a considerable volume of material needs to be presented: but even at 350 pages the result tends to be a bit of a list.

As with other books in the *Instant Notes* series the text comes in short “Sections” (they are not called chapters) of a few pages. Each of these commences with a summary section (a half-page or often more) entitled *Key Notes*, divided into short paragraphs or sentences with bullet points. I found that reading these gave me a great deal of information – often all I wanted to know – and I didn’t get much extra from reading the ‘Section’ itself. I suspect that many students might take this route and one has to admit that this subject area is very information rich and practitioners need to have a lot of information at their fingertips.

The book is divided up as follows. The first 43 pages form a general introduction to microbial pathogenesis (including prions). This is followed by extensive sections on, first, viruses, and second, bacteria. There is then a short section (in five parts on ‘Human pathogens: eukaryotic microorganisms’ which includes a section on helminths and parasitic arthropods. These of course are hardly microscopic or “microbes”, but I suppose are included for the sake of completeness – and also because some of them are vectors for microscopic pathogens. The last two sections deal with diagnosis, treatment and prevention, including extensive details on antibiotic use, and finally on clinical manifestations. One might have thought that the clinical manifestations should come before diagnosis and treatment, but this section seems to fit quite comfortably where it is. It includes sections on skin, bone, eye, respiratory tract, GIT, urinary and genital tract infections, and pregnancy. Here as elsewhere there is detailed consideration of how to deal with immunocompromised patients.

Overall I would say that the coverage is pretty complete at the level intended and the writing is straightforward and easy to read. There are not many diagrams or micrographs of actual organisms, although there are quite a lot of chemical structures (e.g. of antibiotics) and simple line diagrams of laboratory procedures and test results. This may be the result of economy in order to keep the size of the book within reasonable bounds. Nevertheless, many of the descriptions of microorganisms, including comments on their identification, said to be important for diagnosis and treatment, could have been aided by pictures.

Reviewed by E J Wood

School of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
University of Leeds
Woodhouse Lane
Leeds
LS2 9JT
e.j.wood@leeds.ac.uk