

Book Reviews

NEW CLINICAL GENETICS – 2ND EDITION.

A Read, D Donnai. Scion publishing Ltd, Banbury, UK, 2011, pp442, £31.99. ISBN 978-1- 904842-80-4.

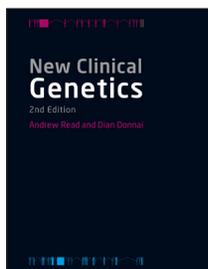
The second edition of this book within four years of the first edition, shows how fast moving the specialty of genetics is – the up to date changes from the recent first edition means that the book justifies its title. The primary readership here is for medical students, but the clinical information would be of interest to all branches of medicine, and those older physicians and surgeons who are a bit nervous of the language of genetics will find lots of very clinical based information in an easily digestible but authoritative format. It follows the UK and American curricula for undergraduate medical students and I would have liked this book as a student myself with the very clinical format had it been available in the 1980's but of course genetics textbooks then were much thinner on detail.

The case histories – 26 in total based on different diseases in theoretical families from A-Z, are excellent and easy to follow. New sections of the book include information on single nucleotide polymorphisms and exome sequencing, and the limitations of genome-wide association studies - all easy to understand for the student or aging physician.

The only error I could find is in one of the case scenarios. All the fictional case histories appear correct – the irony is that the one real pedigree the authors included based on Queen Victoria and her haemophilia A is actually now incorrect in that in 2010 a mutation in factor IX was found to be the cause of haemophilia in Queen Victoria's descendants. I expect the next edition to be updated to haemophilia B and the authors could well extend the story into mentioning some of the recent publications on how using mitochondrial DNA from Prince Philip (a 3rd cousin of Queen Elizabeth – as well as her consort, just to give more genetics trivia) helped fit pieces of historical genetic jigsaw together into the Russian royal family DNA investigations, following exhumation of some of the Tsar's family – all fascinating reading and gripping stories that would interest all students.

For the next edition, the authors might consider a digital edition for the iPad, given that CD and DVDs are now passé and the digital download is the current vogue. This should be cheaper and a way to boost sales to students in the current recession.

They might also include some actual snippets on genome screens on public figures who have had their entire DNA analysed. They could do worse than start with Ozzy Osbourne – the Prince of darkness and beheader of bats. Publication of his DNA sequence confirmed that he carries some Neanderthal lineage, and also provides an explanation



for why he has survived a lifetime of injecting or ingesting large quantities of narcotics and alcohols. Complete genome analysis found he had unusual variants in his ADH4 gene that metabolises alcohol, and other genes were identified to explain his addictive personality, tremor and dyslexia. What better way for students to learn how genetics works than studying some contemporary figures?

Patrick J Morrison

NAPOLEON AND I OR THE SIGNIFICANT MISS FANNY MITCHELL

Napoleon & I Or The Significant Miss Fanny Mitchell, Robert Shelley. Quiller Publishing Ltd 2011 RRP: £6.99, ISBN: 978-1-84689-114-4

Robert Shelley's intention was to create an informal and approachable book that would share the intriguing and fascinating details of Napoleons demise. This he has certainly succeeded in doing, creating a very enjoyable read for anyone interested in the history of medicine.

Shelley uses the journals of four doctors who treated Napoleon in his years on St Helena; B.E. O'Meara, J. Stokoe, F. Antommarchi and A. Arnott. These sources help build a wonderfully human story. Political details are interwoven with the more mundane aspects of restrictions on Napoleon's household and how these all impacted on his health. We are taken through the events that led from Napoleon being in good health, simply a rather tubby man, in Oct 1815, to his death as his vital organs failed in May 1821. The final chapter details his subsequent post mortem. Shelley's account engenders much sympathy for O'Meara and Stokoe who were caught by regulations, vexations and even spiteful tricks created by Sir Hudson Lowe, Governor of St Helena. For endeavouring to carry out their medical duties O'Meara and Stokoe were dismissed from Naval service with the later also being court-martialled. High stakes indeed.

Throughout we are given remarkable medical details of Napoleon's symptoms and his doctor's attempts to bring him comfort. Never keen to take medicines his doctors were often limited in their prescriptions to a variety of baths, warm or salt water, and enemas. We do however hear of such things as the massage he accepted with an ammonia and opium liniment for vague pains and many other concoctions that the doctors would have liked him to take. It adds up to a fascinating insight into the medical times of Napoleon.

Robert Shelley is the nom de plume of retired medical practitioner Robert Richardson. Whilst his medical training is an undoubted advantage in his interpretation of the writings of the various doctors his style is such that his work can be equally appreciated by a non- medical audience. I very much enjoyed this book and would fully recommend it.

Susan Kelly

