

BOOK REVIEW

The hypertensive disorders of pregnancy. Report of a WHO study group

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This report presents an expert review of available epidemiological and clinical data that can be used to improve the classification, diagnosis, and management of the hypertensive disorders of pregnancy. In view of the complexity of these disorders and the frequency of conflicting evidence reported in the literature, the book makes a special effort to clarify controversies and to replace confusion with clear guidelines for diagnosis and treatment. More than 350 studies were critically evaluated.

The book opens with a definition and classification of the clinical manifestations of these disorders, including explanations of the diagnostic significance of oedema, weight gain, blood pressure changes, and proteinuria. Signs that should not be included in the classification, yet should not be ignored, are also defined. A section devoted to incidence discusses the methodological problems that have weakened most studies and describes a recently developed method that has been used to obtain detailed population data in several countries. Other sections examine the evidence implicating a number of predisposing factors, ranging from age and parity to blood groups and fetal sex, and outline what is known about the pathophysiology of hypertension in pregnancy. Data on physiological changes during normal pregnancies are given for comparison. The remaining sections concentrate on guidelines for diagnosis and treatment. An outline of diagnostic tests, progressing from basic to sophisticated, is followed by a critical review of reported maternal, fetal, and neonatal complications. A section addressing the problem of differential diagnosis describes features that can be used to distinguish between primary hypertensive disorders and those that are secondary to other causes of hypertension and proteinuria. The book concludes with a discussion of the role of primary health care in case detection followed by detailed guidelines for treatment and management at secondary and tertiary centres. Readers are given concise but thorough advice on drug treatment and patient monitoring in severe cases, factors influencing the decision for delivery, post-delivery care, and the management of pre-existing hypertension or renal diseases.

For gynaecologists and obstetricians, the book offers an improved understanding of clinical manifestations and related pathophysiological mechanisms as well as an expert guide to diagnosis and treatment. For researchers, the book will help clarify methodological problems that have led to conflicting findings while also defining areas where further research is needed.

A copy of the above report is available in the MMA library.