

A Guidebook on Histological Diagnosis of Inflammatory Skin Diseases

Edited by P Jayalakshmi, H H Suraiya, A Kreetharan

This slim and unpretentious volume could equally well have been entitled "Aids to Histological Diagnosis of Inflammatory Skin Diseases". It seeks to do no more than point up the most characteristic features of common inflammatory skin diseases, and provide an additional element of clinicopathological correlates. The three authors are well qualified for the task, and the final product is nicely balanced. The book is divided into 4 sections, the first dealing with healthy skin, biopsy methodology and an outline of laboratory methods with a useful glossary of terms. As a follower of the European school of histopathology, I might take issue with the authors advice that "a 3mm punch biopsy is adequate for the diagnosis of most skin diseases". An elliptical scalpel biopsy is well worth the extra effort in terms of preservation of skin architecture and a less visible scar. A more detailed consideration of widely used monoclonal antibodies and their significance would also help to dispel the mystique shrouding reports on immunocytochemistry of mononuclear cell infiltrates.

The second section on inflammatory skin diseases is practical, but I was surprised to find no mention of urticaria - one of the most commonest inflammatory skin diseases, and frequently biopsied to exclude urticarial vasculitis. In any case, the inclusion of common skin diseases rarely biopsied is laudable, since insights into the histopathology assist in understanding the pathomechanisms of the disease. The third section focuses on epidermis, dermis, appendages and subcutaneous fat, and is useful for the beginner, enabling links to be established between classical specific histological changes and clinical diagnosis. The final section on "differential diagnosis and clues to diagnosis" is well illustrated with clinical photos and photomicrographs most of which are good quality.

This book is to be commended for the Medical Officer or GP confronted with a patient with a skin disease to which a dermatologist has attached a puzzling diagnosis involving a long Latin name. It could also be useful for the 1st year trainee specialist in dermatology. I hope the trinity of authors will feel sufficiently encouraged to get together again to write a second volume encompassing skin tumours and related disorders.

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