

## Book Review

### **Dental Caries: The Disease and its Management**

Edited by Ole Fejerskov and Edwina Kidd, Blackwell Munksgaard 2003. 350 pp, £75.

This book is a major new work on a subject of vital concern to all dentists. It builds on the work of two former books, *Textbook of Clinical Cariology*, and *Fluoride in Dentistry*, to present a definitive resource on caries prevention and treatment. The editors have enlisted the support of 28 experts who have contributed a wealth of knowledge. It also presents diverse and often controversial opinions.

The book consists of 22 chapters in four parts: The Disease, Diagnosis, Prevention, Non-operative and Operative Treatments and Prognosis, Caries Control and Prediction. It provides a clear understanding of the disease process and the reader is guided through the maze of treatment decisions required for effective management.

Part I, the section on the disease deals with the various aspects of this multifactorial disease. It also includes an extensive chapter on composition and secretion of saliva. To understand the physiology of saliva is to understand the dynamics of caries initiation, progression and prevention.

Part II on Diagnosis dissects the various biological processes underlying lesion development and their contribution to the diagnostic process. It emphasizes the need to differentiate between active and arrested lesions. However, the assessment of disease activity is fraught with uncertainty. In the process, it highlights the shortcomings of clinical decision-making. Equally importantly, it emphasizes that the association between a diagnosis and the subsequent intervention should vary depending on the individual, the population and time, not just one of reaching for the thrill of the drill.

Part III details the major factors influencing lesion development and progression. It also places operative intervention and prevention in a biological context. The history of fluoride is a fascinating account of the scientific enquiry of two dentists Fredrick McKay and Trendley Dean. The cariostatic mechanisms of fluoride are explained and how this knowledge can be best used to prevent the disease is presented. The challenge is to develop and maintain the lowest caries experience and incidence with the simplest of methods.

The chapter on operative management of caries is both provocative and salutary. It shows how people such as GV Black tried to understand the disease process as the basis for treatment decisions. It suggests that the profession lost its way partly by erroneously concentrating on the lesion as the problem and being preoccupied with the technicalities of restoration. In the ensuing confusion, the logic underlying treatment decisions has disappeared. It repeatedly points out how GV Black addressed the problems in operative dentistry with total logic, from prevention to restoration, within the limitations imposed by the equipment and material of the day.

Technical perfection is not to be derided. In order that the restored tooth is cleansable, with a perfect junction between the tooth and the filling, technical perfection is a necessity.

The final chapter asks whether it is possible to predict who is at risk. The multifactorial aetiology makes this difficult with even the most sophisticated models of risk factors and risk markers. Therefore, the authors recommend that clinicians should focus on controlling the lesions the patient already has instead of being too preoccupied with predicting the future. It also recommends that the prevention of caries should be based on the population strategy.

This is an extremely readable book distilling the available scientific evidence on the disease, its progression, control and prevention. It is well illustrated with over 400 figures and colour plates. It is unfortunate that the colour illustrations are grouped together in two lots rather than having them interspersed with the text. One suspects that the authors were disappointed with this too. The reason behind that decision by the publishers apparently was to keep the costs down. However, at £75 a copy, whether the undergraduate students will purchase this text remains to be seen.

Notwithstanding that reservation, this is a book every clinician should own, read and digest.

DYD SAMARAWICKRAMA

*Senior Tutor (Dentistry)*

*Honorary Consultant in Restorative Dentistry*

*Barts & The London*

*Queen Mary's School of Medicine & Dentistry*

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