BOOK REVIEW

Modern Surgical Pathology, Second Edition
2-Volume Set
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Saunders Elsevier
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2432 pages, $459.00

This is the second edition of a multi-authored text covering general surgical pathology. Such texts are useful to trainees, general surgical pathologists, and specialists who are called upon to make a diagnosis outside their own field. Factors that make a book useful for such applications include both the quality of the content and its accessibility. Most of the chapters are well written, each by one or more experts in the field. The content is quite good (I only found 4 minor errors). All organs are covered, and only a few disorders are not; the illustrations are generally quite good and suitable in number. The index is useful.

The 2-volume set (7.5 kg/16.5 lb) begins with chapters on general subjects ranging from gross room setup to molecular biology that are worth reading; the most useful are those on intraoperative consultation, quality improvement, and medicolegal issues. The immunohistochemistry chapter provides good general approaches, particularly for fans of algorithms, but integration of immunohistochemistry into diagnoses needs to be covered in the organ-specific chapters.

The book then covers the organ systems. This is where some annoyances appear. This is the second incarnation of this text, and there has been valuable fresh input from a number of sources. However, multiauthor texts can be inconsistent in presentation, and that is the principal shortcoming of this text. There is considerable variation in the organization of the chapters and in their integration of immunohistochemistry and discussion of differential diagnoses. A few entities are misplaced, such as atypical fibroxanthoma in the Ear chapter but not in the Skin chapter. A few entities are not covered, such as pyloric gland adenoma and thymic B-cell hyperplasia, but overall, the coverage is good. Users who turn to a chapter on a specific organ and browse to the disorder/tumor in question will find that about half of the chapters begin with benign neoplasms and progress to malignant ones, whereas the other half do the opposite.

Most chapters are well organized, with frequent and consistent section headers and practical differential diagnosis paragraphs for most entities. Some chapters, including those on serous membranes, breast, and lung, have excellent content but are inconsistent, with long stretches of text lacking headers. Where appropriate, most chapters present TNM staging outlines, but mostly only straightforward aspects are discussed. Problematic aspects, such as the evaluation of lung carcinoma invasion of visceral pleura, could be more usefully discussed. One does not come to a book like this for straightforward staging (the AJCC Manual is more complete and current), but rather for help with difficult or unclear staging issues.

The Mediastinum chapter presents the authors’ views on thymoma classification, a controversial subject. Their simplified 3-tiered scheme lumps historically different tumors based on similar clinical outcomes, whereas the World Health Organization (WHO) classification splits them into 7 predominant patterns. Whether lumpers, splitters, or those in-between are ultimately correct, a clearer description of the WHO types (as recommended by the CAP Thymus Protocol) would be useful.

The Gastrointestinal chapters are generally well written and complete, but carcinomas of the gastroesophageal junction are not clearly addressed in either the Stomach or Esophagus chapters. The Large Intestine chapter contains abundant information, but its approach to colorectal carcinoma is confusing. Discussions of T1 carcinomas and endoscopic mucosal resections are useful as these are becoming more clinically relevant.

The Tumors of the Skin chapter is also uneven. The second half, covering melanomas, is complete and provides useful differential diagnostic features, but the first half (nonmelanoma) provides very few differential diagnosis discussions. The Lymphoid section could be coordinated better with the Hematolymphoid chapter to ensure up-to-date consistent and correct terminology.

The book finishes with well-written and extensively illustrated chapters on the pituitary, CNS tumors, neurodegenerative disorders, muscle/nerve biopsies, and the eye. These are all very useful to a general surgical pathologist. The CNS Tumor chapter does an especially good job of including immunohistochemistry, molecular biology, and differential diagnosis for each entity.

The text comes with Web access to a copy of the book and most of the figures. This works smoothly but does not compare to having the book on one’s desk. Additional relevant figures would be useful. For example, the text describes the critical distinction of Gleason Grade 3 from Grade 4 well but only provides 1 photomicrograph of each, and more examples on the Web would be a valuable addition. Also included is access to expertconsult.com, a Web-based diagnostic aid. A description of this is beyond the scope of this review, but note that it is not based on or related in any way to this text.

Based on the quality of its content, this text does belong in the company of other big-name general surgical pathology texts, but format inconsistencies detract a bit from its usefulness. In an age with online journals, new Armed Forces Institute of Pathology fascicles, useful WHO books, and a plethora of specialty pathology texts, what is the role for general pathology texts such as this? For residents, a general text may provide a compendium of knowledge at a level that seems more attainable than do specialty texts. General pathologists and specialists wandering outside of their fields use them to refresh their memories and to look for ideas on difficult cases that can then be pursued elsewhere. In both cases, this text deserves a serious look.

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