

BOOK REVIEW : BOEKBESPREKING

GASTRO-OESOPHAGEAL JUNCTION

The Gastro-Oesophageal Junction. Clinical applications to oesophageal and gastric surgery. By G. S. Muller Botha, M.D. (Cape Town), F.R.F.P.S., Ch.M. (Birm.), F.R.C.S. Pp. x + 369. Illustrated R7.50. London: J. & A. Churchill Ltd. 1962.

This handsomely bound and printed work is the culmination of many years of diligent research. This includes an impressive amount of original research on the microscopic and macroscopic anatomy and the physiology of the gastro-oesophageal region in the embryo, foetus, infant, child and adult as well as a comparative anatomical study in 21 different animal species.

Together with two colleagues, Dr. Muller Botha was the first to use synchronous combined cine-radiography and electro-manometry in the study of the physiology of the terminal oesophagus. This experimental work served as the basis for his original ideas as regards the anatomy and physiology of the gastro-oesophageal junction, and largely influenced his approach to the treatment of disorders in this region. The dogmatic statements are refreshing and leave one in no doubt as to what the author believes, and are exactly what one would expect from an author who can talk with as much authority as Dr. Muller Botha.

Seeing that some of these statements are controversial there are bound to be dissenting opinions, but those who do not agree with the author will have to present weighty evidence to prove their point of view.

An important contribution is the suggestion of a practical and workable nomenclature which, if universally accepted, will do away with the confusing terminology used hitherto.

His anatomical studies of the hiatus should be read by all those interested in this region. He convincingly proves the presence of an intrinsic lower oesophageal sphincter, and in a truly scholarly way refers not only to this sphincter in the bat, the rat, the tortoise, etc., but his references range as far apart as the great basking shark and Houdini.

Dr. Muller Botha introduced the term 'empty segment' to describe a radiological appearance normally seen in the lower end of the oesophagus, and he ascribes it to a combination of the lower oesophageal sphincter and the hiatus. This is used as an important landmark in differentiating a phrenic ampulla, which lies above the empty segment, from a hiatus hernia which lies below it. His views on the so-called Schatzki ring and the radiological picture of hiatus hernia are interesting, stimulating, and probably correct.

An important contribution is made to the recognition and treatment of functional and anatomical disorders of the lower oesophagus and gastro-oesophageal junction, with hiatus hernia as a highlight in this respect.

Dr. Muller Botha will be the first to admit that the last word has not yet been said on the intricate mechanism of the gastro-oesophageal junction, but his work is a milestone that sets a standard which will be difficult to surpass, and no doctor interested in this region, be he general practitioner, paediatrician, physician, surgeon or radiologist, can afford to be without this book.

The only criticism that can be made is that of minor grammatical and typographical errors, which will undoubtedly be eliminated in a second edition, which is bound to follow.

J.A.B.
A.D.K.