Correspondence

Histological assessment of liver siderosis

Following the article by George *et al* on the histological measurement of liver siderosis[1] we wish to report our method of assessing heterogeneous liver siderosis. The semiquantitative method that we validated in genetic haemochromatosis[2] was modified by introducing a coefficient according to heterogeneity of iron distribution. A coefficient of one third was applied in cases of very heterogenous siderosis (iron deposits in fewer than one third of hepatic lobules), of two thirds in cases of heterogeneous siderosis (iron deposits in one third to two thirds of hepatic lobules), and of one (three thirds) in cases of homogeneous siderosis (iron deposits in more than two thirds of hepatic lobules). The corrected histological iron score was defined as the product of the histological iron score and the coefficient.

This corrected method was validated by studying the correlation between liver iron content measured biochemically (< 36 μmol/g) and the result of the histological score in a panel of 254 liver biopsies with siderosis on Perls's stain. The panel comprised 160 biopsies with homogeneous liver siderosis and 94 with heterogeneous siderosis (very heterogeneous in 14 cases and mildly heterogeneous in 80). Correlation between liver iron content and non-corrected score was $r = 0.85$ in homogeneous and $r = 0.70$ in heterogeneous cases. After the application of the corrected histological score the correlation with liver iron content was improved ($r = 0.76$) (fig 1).

The correction of the histological iron score by such a coefficient led to improved correlation between liver iron content and histological iron score. Thus histological quantification was possible in all types of liver siderosis (homogeneous or heterogeneous). George *et al*, using our histological iron score, graded subjectively the "mean pattern" in cases of heterogeneous iron overload. We have proposed and validated a less subjective method.

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1 George P, Conaghan C, Angus H, Walmsley T, Chapman B. Comparison of histological and biochemical hepatic iron indexes in the diagnosis of genetic haemochromatosis. *J Clin Pathol* 1996;**49**:159–63.
2 Deugnier Y, Loréal O, Turlin B, Guyader D, Jouanolle H, Moirand R, *et al*. Liver pathology in genetic hemochromatosis: a review of 135 homozygous cases and their bioclinical correlations. *Gastroenterology* 1992;**102**:2050–9.

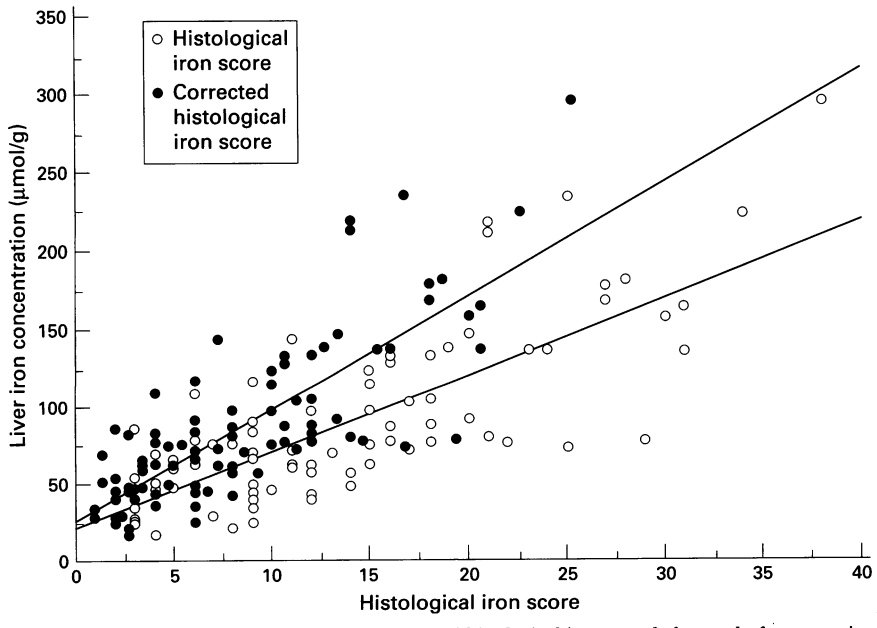

Figure 1 Correlation between liver iron content and histological iron score before and after correction by a coefficient according to heterogeneity in 94 patients with heterogenous liver siderosis.

Book reviews

Essential Clinical Pathology. D V Parums, ed. (Pp 707.) Blackwell Science, 1996. ISBN 0 6320 3088 7.

This book is part of a series of *Essentials* produced by Blackwell Science. Other books in the series include immunology, allergy, haematology, and basic pathology. It is a multiauthor book based on material used to teach a 10 week pathology course at Oxford University Medical School during 1991–93. Therefore, it is aimed primarily aimed at undergraduate medical students; however, a basic knowledge of preclinical pathology is assumed of the reader from the start.

It is organised in three sections: part 1 covers the basic laboratory and diagnostic principles of each pathology speciality; part 2 deals with disease processes involving multiple systems; and part 3 covers the clinical pathology of the systems and integrates the different disciplines. The book is beautifully illustrated with colour macroscopic and microscopic pictures, line drawings, and cartoons. There are trendy coloured boxes with bullet points and summaries.

The books in the *Essentials* series are supposed to contain core material and they are all described as core textbooks. However, I take issue with the authors that this is a core undergraduate textbook. For example, in the section on cardiovascular disease, there are excellent accounts of myocardial infarction and valve disease, but this rapidly extends into some very esoteric detail. For example, Keshan cardiomyopathy is described. This rare disease is apparently endemic in China and doubtless very important to know about if you are a cardiac physician or specialised pathologist, but for undergraduates? I don't think so. Similarly, the WHO classification of the four types of lupus nephritis cannot possibly be justified as core material in an undergraduate curriculum.

With recent changes in the philosophy of medical education promoted by the General Medical Council, the concept of the core curriculum, authors and publishers are keen to produce core textbooks, but very few are actually brave enough to leave anything out. There is a real tension for publishers who commission and advertise books that really do contain core information and being able to sell them. The publishers want books to have lots in them for people to feel they are getting value for money and the books to have as wide an appeal as possible. This textbook, which is supposedly a core textbook for undergraduate medical students, is also according to the authors and publishers suitable for "higher exam candidates".

I like this book and shall refer to it for my own teaching. Junior pathologists in training will find it useful for the MRCPath examination. It is, however, a misrepresentation to call it a core textbook for undergraduates and as such I shall not recommend it to Southampton students.

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Pathology: A Core Text of Basic Pathological Processes with Self-assessment. P Bass, C duBoulay. (Pp 127.) Churchill Livingstone, 1997. ISBN 0 4430 5003 1.

How much do I need to know? This, the opening title in this book, isn't the $64 000 question; it really is worth a lot more than that. This book is an admirable attempt to answer it and to present core pathological material without the excessive and sometimes unnecessary detail found in many standard undergraduate pathology texts. You could argue that some of the material in the self-assessment sections isn't necessarily core, whatever that is, but that would be nit-picking. The text is wonderfully up to date and presents some newer, more modern concepts in the succinct way that I for one have been trying unsuccessfully to formulate for years. Moreover, by using case histories, it puts pathology firmly where it belongs; at the centre of medical education.

Perhaps even more importantly, the book has taken on board the General Medical Council's recommendations in *Tomorrow's doctors*, taking the emphasis away from factual rote learning and on to the concepts of learning by exploration and discovery in a way that is still lamentably rare in our medical schools. If this attitude is the norm in Southampton, I