

Preface

This book is dedicated primarily to the patients, medical and laboratory staff, trainees and students – both past and present – of the Haematology department, Hammersmith Hospital, formerly the site of the Royal Postgraduate Medical School in London; but of course also to all their peers anywhere else. The book has been largely compiled by selecting a few among the hundreds of blood films, clinical and laboratory data that were reviewed in the Wednesday 3 p.m. sessions held in the diagnostic lab. Many of the cases were presented at the annual “Advances in Haematology” Course (colloquially known as the *June Course*) held at the hospital over many years; and a few have been published in regular journals.

This is not a textbook; rather, it is a collection of real-life diagnostic problems that arose from patients seen in the clinic or referred by colleagues. Red cell disorders are still numerically the majority amongst those that haematologists are called upon to diagnose and treat. Therefore, we hope the collection may be of some use to haematologists and biomedical scientists.

Historically, haematology has been at the forefront of molecular medicine: today the adjective has become almost redundant, because medicine cannot be but molecular. We have been fortunate to belong to the generation that has taken part in the transition from blood film haematology to molecular haematology: in a way, this is the common thread in our 44 cases. We have adhered for each case to a simple self-explanatory format,

in which investigations take off from the blood film: we hope readers will forgive us if we have sometimes indulged on rather detailed description of red cell morphology, whereby we have introduced some neologisms.

Many cases were initially investigated when molecular methodologies were mostly Southern blotting, the polymerase chain reaction (PCR), and Sanger sequencing. Many cases could thus be solved; in some cases, these methods were subsequently supplemented or replaced by some that today are used routinely, such as NGS (next generation sequencing), MLPA (multiplex ligation-dependent probe amplification), or nanopore analysis.

In the references listed at the end of each case we have included, whenever it seemed appropriate, those reflecting recent developments; but since this is not a textbook, we have refrained from including too many. Pertinent reference books are listed on a separate page at the end of this preface.

We owe so much to so many people that this preface risks becoming too long, but we wish to thank most warmly at least some of those who have in various ways made this book possible. In looking at blood and bone marrow smears, our late dear colleague David Swirsky was a final authority; and Kay Williams retrieved many of the precious slides. In the diagnostic laboratory, under the leadership of the beloved late Eleanor Lloyd, MBE, and then of Anne Bradshaw, the contributions by Sue Saunders, Alan Clarke, and Joel Lieberman were invaluable; Richard Manning, the late Corrine Jury and Tom Vulliamy provided important laboratory records; Melanie Proven kindly offered updates on current advances. The late Mitchell Lewis made the haematology laboratory at the Hammersmith a reference center by running for years the National External Quality Assessment Scheme (NEQAS); at the same time, Ted Gordon-Smith had unrivaled experience in the clinical management of disorders of the red cell. Barbara Bain, in charge of haematology at St. Mary's, at the time a sister institution to the Hammersmith, has been a reference figure in the teaching of haematology. We thank Mike Laffan for much highly informed advice; Marc Heller and Mark Layton for clinical data and for providing long-term follow-up in some cases. Medical Records and Library personnel were always most helpful. A special bonus at the Hammersmith was the presence of high-level experts in all specialties of medicine, who freely provided advice on many patients in the wards and, over coffee, after Staff Rounds every Wednesday; Sir Keith Peters, Professor of Medicine, was a strong supporter of Haematology. Last but not least, we pay tribute to the late Sir John Dacie, a towering figure who had founded the Haematology Department.

Since patients were referred from the UK and from other countries by many colleagues, we particularly wish to thank all of them: they are named individually at the end of each of the 44 cases. The late Bruno Rotoli and Rosario Notaro have been, for one of us, lifetime precious colleagues in haematology research.

It is not for us to say how far this book may serve its educational purpose for others: speaking for ourselves, we believe that lessons we have learned from investigating these 44 cases have helped us in subsequent problem solving.

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