Book Review

The Potbelly Syndrome
Russell Farris and
Per Mårin, M.D., Ph.D.
Basic Health Publications, Inc.,
Laguna Beach, CA. 2006
Paperback, 246 pages

Common germs, not fatty foods, cause heart disease. Diets with caloric restriction make us gain weight. Cholesterol is good for us. Insulin resistance, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes are all caused by chronic subtle hypercortisolism.

These are some of the assertions in this contrarian book that might, at first glance, cause the cynical reader to wonder what product the authors are selling. As it turns out, they're selling ideas, not supplements. This is not the standard commercial health book, with the exposition of a problem that's easily solved by a miracle nutrient or universally appropriate diet. The advice that's offered here is more limited and not so easily followed.

The Potbelly Syndrome provides a novel insight into some old information. It shifts the paradigm. The lead author, Russell Farris, is a researcher in the field of artificial intelligence. He has, over the past several years, been applying his considerable analytical skills to the prevention of diabetes, obesity, and heart disease. The second author, Dr. Per Mårin, has studied diabetes and obesity for 20 years, and for the past 15 has been writing on hypersecretion of cortisol in relation to those disorders.

Potbelly Syndrome (PBS) is the authors term for chronic, subtle hypercortisolism. The diagnostic features of PBS are enumerated by Dr. Mårin in Chapter 16, in which he also shows the relation between PBS and various dysmetabolic syndromes described by others (e.g., Reaven's Syndrome X). Measuring the abdominal sagittal diameter of the supine patient is of diagnostic value because visceral fat, unlike subcutaneous fat, tends not to flatten in the supine position. One hopes that this simple test will become more widely used.

The authors' thesis is that persistent infections with *Chlamydophila pneumoniae* (CPN) or other common microorganisms will cause acute-phase reactions that, often enough, initiate arterial lesions that become atherosclerosis. The inflammation characteristic of the acute phase promotes a countering secretion of cortisol, and chronically elevated, supra-optimal cortisol then leads to insulin resistance, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and abdominal obesity (PBS).

The book is well researched, and the reasoning is surely convincing. If there's a flaw in the analysis, it's that Farris' starting point is his own heart attack, which occurred after 37 years of chronic CPN infection, and in spite of standard measures (diet and exercise) intended to avert it. The danger in generalizing from one's own experience, of course, is that one's disease could be a subset of a larger category, and not at all typical of the category as a whole.

Indeed, the morbidity statistically associated with familial dyslipidemias is reason enough to suppose that while cholesterol may have been irrelevant to Farris' heart disease, it is highly relevant to members of another subset. Nevertheless, even if an infectious etiology were not responsible for many heart attacks, such a cause for even a small number should receive more consideration than it has to date.

Chapters in *The Potbelly Syndrome* deal with infections and insulin resistance, how germs cause atherosclerosis, why dieting fails, stress and appetite, Cushing's syndrome, and related matters. There are four self-help chapters, including how to avoid stressors and build stress resistance, and how to reverse infection-cortisol loops.

All things considered, this is not a book for the average reader of health magazines. It will appeal to those who want the intellectual stimulation of a new perspective and who are satisfied with knowing what the questions are, even though all the answers are not in. It is written in a lively way with an oft-humorous touch. My admiration for this book has only grown since I first glimpsed the manuscript four years ago. It belongs in every doctor's library.

–review by Richard P. Huemer, M.D.

The User's Guide to Heart-Healthy Supplements
Michael Janson, M.D.
Basic Health Publications, 2004
Paperback, 91 pages

There is a heart attack every 25 seconds in the USA, and nearly half are fatal. Well over 2,000 Americans die from heart disease every single day. What we need is a good pocket-sized how-to guide, that anyone can afford, to stop this slaughter. Now we have one: *The User's Guide to Heart-Healthy Supplements,* by Michael Janson, M.D.

Dr. Janson's approach is orthomolecular and his message is a life-saver: take supplements, and here's why. His book is concise, like an exceptionally well-written thesis. It is readable, like a well-written magazine article. And most important, it is dose-specific and practical, like few other 91-page books that you've ever seen. It contains level-headed advice coupled with discussion ranging from time-honored herbal remedies to the latest nutraceuticals. The role of homocysteine is well explained and duly emphasized. There are especially good sections on heart-friendly amino acids, magnesium, and essential fatty acids. This is to be expected in a book authored by Janson, a highly-experienced physician, and one of a popular series edited by veteran nutrition writer Jack Challem.

Skeptics looking for unguarded statements or extreme recommendations will be quite disappointed. Dr. Janson advocates good-sense lifestyle modification, appropriate medical testing, and seeking out a knowledgeable nutrition-oriented physician. He is sharply critical of high protein and fad diets, a group that he specifically indicates to include the Atkins, "Zone," and "Blood Type" diets. Janson urges readers to eat very little, if any, meat. He writes: "Meats from land animals, including poultry, and dairy products are unnecessary in the diet, although very small amounts are not likely to do too much harm." And he's right.

As in his previous books (*Chelation Therapy and Your Health* and *Dr. Janson's New Vitamin Revolution*) Janson makes a welcome departure from medical orthodoxy in recommending a bevy of supplemental nutrients in large doses. He strays even further from the fold in expressing a very positive view of chelation therapy. On the other hand, his diet and exercise recommendations are indisputable, his vitamin C and niacin sections are measured and reasonable, and the section on vitamin E is actually quite conservative. Additionally, the book contains short but content-dense chapters on healthy heart function, heart abnormalities, and risk factors for heart disease. Nutritional suggestions for a comprehensive heart treatment program are clearly provided in tabular form, a convenience readers always appreciate. I would have liked to have seen a brief consideration of lecithin included. There is a good selection of references listed at the end of the book, although I think the addition of in-text numbered footnotes would add persuasive power without adding pages or slowing down the reader.

This is a fine little book, well-written, well-supported, and well-indexed. Page

for page, it is the best writing on how to beat cardiovascular disease that I have yet seen. I highly recommend *The User's Guide to Heart-Healthy Supplements* for patients and practitioners alike.

–review by Andrew W. Saul, Ph.D.

Emphysema and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease: Therapeutic Approaches Through Nutrition, Natural Medicine, Alternative Medicine
By Robert J. Green Jr., N.D.
Aventine Press, 2005
Paperback, 212 pages

Considering that Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is the fourth leading cause of death in America, it's about time that Robert Green's new book, *Emphysema and COPD,* appears from behind the smoke screen of current literature on conventional approaches to so-called "smokers'" diseases.

Green's skill as an educator is evident from this substantial compilation of nutritional and dietary methods which deal with emphysema and COPD. Written for physicians and their patients, the book describes therapeutic approaches including food and lifestyle choices, nutritional supplementation, herbal medicine and alternative methods such as exercise and homeopathy. Green uses medical diagrams and provides ample rationale to support these approaches. The book is an excellent primer for determined readers, as well as physicians looking to familiarize themselves with natural therapies to treat emphysema/COPD.

Briefly mentioned in the book, orthomolecular medicine is offered as proof for the reader that nutritional status is paramount for treating emphysema/COPD naturally. While there are no explanations about the orthomolecular approach, Green does employ in his supplement chapter dosage recommendations that one could consider as orthomolecular in nature. In addition, he lists the supplements' potential adverse reactions, contraindications and drug interactions. In the herbal medicine chapter, Green includes a complete list of herbs and their actions, methods of use, dosages and cautions. This information would allow any practitioner, conventional, orthomolecular or other, to feel comfortable following these recommendations.

Green emphasizes the power of persuasion rather than guilt as a motivator to encourage COPD patients to be responsible for their own health. He repeatedly confirms that the initial decision to smoke is now "water under the bridge" and that the choice to pursue a healthier lifestyle remains with the reader.

The book is presented in a cohesive manner, and Green willingly shares his personal disbelief in the current medical approaches. *Emphysema and COPD* offers physicians and their patients a place to start learning, and hopefully pursuing, alternative, non-conventional methods to deal with these diseases.

–review by Talya Rotem, M.A.

Cancer: Nutrition and Survival
Steve Hickey, PhD and Hilary Roberts, PhD
Lulu Press, 2005
Paperback, 295 pages

Many years ago, when I crossed the equator aboard a ship, I caught myself in the act of half-looking for a line of floats, a dotted line, a marker of some sort, to indicate that the hemispheres had changed. Ridiculous, I confess. Yet, as we look outward at our shared biosphere, and inward at our common biochemistry, one may even wonder if our very skin is something of an arbitrary boundary between internal and external environments. Do our cells and tissues have their own microevolution, mirroring that of fishes and finches?

In their new book, *Cancer: Nutrition and Survival*, Drs. Steve Hickey and Hilary Roberts propose that "cancer is a consequence of our evolution from single-celled to multi-celled organisms" and that the "causes of the disease are explained according to a simple evolutionary model... Biological principles predict that cancer-killing substances should occur frequently in nature, and this is indeed the case."

Simple explanation for cancer? Natural cures for cancer? One can almost hear orthodox oncologists lighting the straw beneath the stake as the authors make such near-heretical statements. But before anyone is torched, would-be judges had best take a look at the evidence. Hickey and Roberts certainly have. *Cancer: Nutrition and Survival* is one of the most tightly referenced books I have ever seen, with a staggering 1,148 citations. The book is well organized, appropriately illustrated, and briefly indexed. In a book this thorough, with so many subtopics and literature citations, an author index would be a good addition.

This is the book of choice to put into the hands of cancer patients who don't know what their options really consist of. It is also my pick for any doctor who may certainly have heard of Linus Pauling, but refuses to read him. Pauling and cancer surgeon Ewan Cameron co-wrote their now-classic *Cancer and Vitamin C* back in 1979, which was last updated in 1993. Hickey and Roberts' *Cancer: Nutrition and Survival* qualifies as a most worthy successor, with the advantage of being right up to date.

But it is much more than just a current review. *Cancer: Nutrition and Survival* has something of the *Fantastic Voyage* movie about it. In the first chapters, we are, in a manner of speaking, reduced in size for a virtual tour of the body from the inside. That the authors enable us to visualize cellular biochemistry is a testament to their skill as scientists. That they can make it compelling is a testimony to their skill as writers. For me, the best part starts on page 106, as the book turns to nutritional solutions to cancer, and zeros in on the benefits of ascorbate therapy. The authors are well versed on the subject, having previously written the first-rate book *Ascorbate: The Science of Vitamin C*.

Only the rarest Hollywood movie sequel is better than the original. Hickey and Roberts may even have surpassed Cameron and Pauling. Says Abram Hoffer, who wrote *Healing Cancer* with Linus Pauling: "The microevolutionary hypothesis of cancer is so simple and elegant; I wish I had thought of it first." This is tantamount to praise from Caesar.

Roger J. Williams wrote, "When in doubt, use nutrition first." There would seem to be few oncologists who practice accordingly. If Dr. Williams' principle does not ring true to them, perhaps Pascal's Wager will: Using ascorbate is more advantageous than not using it. It makes little sense to close the door on this and other available nutritional cancer therapies that, at the very least, improve quality and length of life and at best, save life.

Consider this book's title. If more patients had better nutrition, they would have better survival. Napoleon is said to have declared that in the next life, doctors will have more lives to answer for then generals. The bad news is that it is too late for the dead to benefit from *Cancer: Nutrition and Survival*. The good news is that it is not too late for the living. Drs. Hickey and Roberts' book needs to be widely read before any more lives are lost.

– review by Andrew W. Saul, Ph.D.