BOOK REVIEWS

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This indigestible book is packed with scientific papers covering topics as diverse as physiology, experimental psychology, ergonomics, and the like, the only theme that is of aging. This is the proceedings of the 1993 European Symposium on Work and Aging, with a few additional contributions.

The commentaries interspersed with the papers provide interesting insight into the lunacy of international business practice that "lays off" by early retirement or redundancy, increasing numbers of mature workers, by displacing costs on to the State. This is in spite of steadily falling numbers of new entrants into work. The demographic changes say it all, as the average age of the European population continues to rise.

The papers taken individually are of interest, but the book as a whole is confusing to the reader, and it has clearly been difficult for the editors to maintain a coherent approach. There is little of immediate relevance to the occupational physician, although the paper on health effects of shift work on the older workers is of some interest. The book is well illustrated and covers the essay on motivational and cultural factors by M J Schabracq, who is an organisational psychologist.

This book has the stated intention of stimulating discussion within a wide audience, which includes occupational health practitioners. It fails in its purpose by being too diffuse, but is nevertheless relevant reading for all who work and maintain the personnel and political policies currently in place across Europe. It is of little comfort that the United Kingdom is not alone in its current pattern of pensioning off the older worker.

S B DIGGLE


This multidisciplinary, multiauthor book of approaching four hundred pages examines the nervous system as it is affected by exposure to toxins and ergonomic stressors at work. It considers epidemiology, exposure measurement, dysfunction, neuropsychiatric disorders, outcomes, rehabilitation, and medico-legal consequences. The "centre of gravity" is in the United States, with 13 of the 15 chapters having American authors.

The authors start from the disciplines of neurology and neurotoxicology, and focus on the "rapidly developing specialty of occupational neurology". Thus, they bring together into one book chemical and physical stressors affecting the nervous system. The occupational physician from the United Kingdom, used to chemical toxicology and ergonomics as separate subjects may find this somewhat unusual.

The book can be divided structurally into two main sections. The first (chapters 1 to 9) looks at the effects of chemicals; the second (chapters 10 to 11) a physical force on the nervous system. There is an interspersed third small section (chapter 10) on medico-legal issues.

As should be expected, this essentially American book uses United States references, occupational health standards, and examples. OSHA, NIOSH, ACGIH, and TLVs® are used throughout with a brief mention of German MAK values.

The first section of the book discusses with epidemiology in the neurological context (chapter 1) with a description of the basic elements needed to relate exposure to nervous tissue injury. Methods are then developed to derive epidemiologic results and statistics. The difficulties in diagnosis of, for instance, a diffuse chemically induced encephalopathy are not shirked, and various methods of avoiding pitfalls are illustrated.

Retrospective and prospective case-control studies are encompassed so that the reader may acquire a firm understanding of modern epidemiologic practice.

Assessment of agents with physical (chapter 2) and the continuum from exposure to disease, provide an overview of occupational hygiene practice. Next comes biological monitoring and clinical disease (chapter 3) covering occupational pulmonology, and gases, with useful summaries of named chemicals and their biological indicators.

Neurological examination (chapter 4) evaluates ways of determining mental status as well as quantitative methods of neurolologic testing, with brief descriptions of the various ancillary tests in current use. Neuropsychological tests used in assessment are reviewed (chapter 5) and the neuropsychiatric consequences of exposure to neurotoxins (chapter 6). The overview of psychosis, dementia, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder in relation to occupation provides a useful synopsis for the occupational doctor.

The visual system (chapter 7) is well covered, with a list of neurotoxins and their specific effects. Brain tumours associated with occupational chemical exposure (chapter 8), and a literature review of substances with an excess risk are tabulated and summarised. Chapter 9 provides an alphabetical list of neurotoxic compounds, human exposure, and clinical manifestations.

Chapter 11 by Buckley from the Robens Institute in the United Kingdom begins the second main section (chapters 11–13). The mechanical effects on the extremities, nerve entrapment, spinal biomechanics, and industrial low back pain are examined, followed by occupational rehabilitation. These chapters are well illustrated and combine practical and mechanical formulae aimed essentially at prevention and advice for the occupational physician.

Chapter 10 "Interaction of Medical and Legal Systems" is entirely American, and examples of United States law are quoted from courts in various states. A number of general principles apply universally, but American details have limited value to the United Kingdom.

Inevitably with many writers, style varies, but the editor has done well in pulling it all together. The various authors themselves have taken care to make what could be turgid reading as interesting as possible, with the insertion of practical examples that liven the text, and focus the mind on the typical everyday problems the reader will face.

In future editions, as research progresses, and the evaluation of the range of psychiatric disorders relating to toxins and occupation expands, then the section on ergonomics and mechanical effects could well be hived off into a separate volume.

For the occupational physician, particularly working in the chemical industry, this will be a useful new publication that should enhance knowledge, and act as a guide in tackling problems arising from actual and potential workplace exposure. The section on physical agents will have an additional interest, and the book as a whole could be helpful for candidates for the Associate of the Faculty of Occupational Medicine.

COLIN JUNIPER


This is a fascinating short volume on how to present data to policy makers. The author is a distinguished public service to health policy workers.

Little of the book deals with major topics, air pollution, air quality, cigarette smoking, asbestos, lead, and electromagnetic fields and their association with health effects. In the first part of the book selected studies are chosen that have been used to show the possible risks. The second part deals with some of the policy issues in relation to these risks. The third part provides cautionary tales of the way in which the public, media, courts, and governments approach the problems of risk assessment.