When I first picked up this book I wondered for what sort of reader it was intended. It looked too small to deal with the enormous breadth of the subject in any great depth so I thought experts and workers in the field who might have wanted a thorough discussion on a particular issue would be deterred. I believed that it would not be attractive to paediatricians and other clinicians because it had a decidedly epidemiological approach to the subject. However, my opinions changed rapidly as I read on.

The chapter topics and their ordering have been thoughtfully chosen. The first three chapters set the scene. The first is an overview, particularly of why children are different from adults, which is space-filler because of their size, physiology, and behaviour. The second presents a concise introduction to the relevant epidemiological methods and to study design, and the third gives a context for risk assessment in the real world. Subsequent chapters deal in turn with specific environmental toxins and hazards which include (apart from the usual suspects of metals, pesticides, and hormones) radiation effects, air pollution and even the potentially dangerous contaminants of water. I began to wonder how the author had managed to pack in so much of interest in such a relatively small space but even so, more detailed information is available from a website at the author’s institution.

It is claimed that it is the “first textbook to focus on environmental threats to child health”. I am sure this is true and for that reason alone this book is to be welcomed. Not only is it one of the few books on childhood with environmental issues that includes genetic and prenatal effects. Another virtue is the author’s obvious belief that environmental effects cannot be understood in isolation from the underlying biology they alter or influence. My conclusion is that this is an excellent book. It is up to date and well written, containing carefully selected information; for example, enough chemistry to understand the biological effects of PCBs and similar compounds, and a recap of normal endocrine function to allow appreciation of the action of environmental hormonally active agents. The topics covered range from environmental toxins such as lead, aluminium, and trimethyltin to the recreational drugs, ethanol and MPTP and inherited neurodegenerative diseases. The effects of these factors on gene expression, signal transduction, and transcription–transduction coupling are discussed. In so doing, the zinc finger, nuclear factor-kappa B (NF-kB) and developmental transcription factors, ionic transporters, glutamate receptors, oxidative stress, DNA repair, are all discussed in some detail.

In common with many multi-author books, the whole could have been improved by greater guidance from the editor. Attention to the design of the book as an entity could also possibly have reduced the repetition of over-simplified introductions to individual chapters and freed up the chapter authors to lead the reader more systematically into the complex core of the information.

Some very helpful diagrams and tables are used to excellent effect and this form of presentation could have been used more to replace often complex text. The level of prior knowledge and understanding assumed is variable. For instance, the author of the Introduction assumes that the reader is knowledgeable about cis-acting DNA elements; then Chapter 2 explains some very basic cell biology and is dismissive of the function glial cells as mainly space-fillers in the brain. Some chapters, such as that on DNA damage and repair in neurotoxicology have succeeded in leading the reader gradually from basic molecular biology to the relevance to neurotoxicology with the help of excellent diagrams. Others are less well presented and although the facts presented are often fascinating, the story is not clear. This is a pity as some parts are well presented, such as the excellent explanation of molecular biology techniques and the description of trimethyltin neurotoxicity.

In conclusion, this is a courageous book, which, for all its shortcomings, is a fascinating read and contains many nuggets of reward, but is not for the faint hearted.

P Edwards

NOTICES

IRAS courses
The following courses are being held in 2005–06:
- Dermal Exposure (DERMEX 2005), Stockholm, Sweden, 10–11 June 2005
- Risk Assessment, Utrecht, Netherlands, 13–16 June 2005
- Environmental and Occupational Epidemiology: Principles of Exposure Assessment, Utrecht, Netherlands, 22–26 August 2005
- Two year MSc course in Toxicology and Environmental Health, Utrecht, Netherlands, starting September 2005 and February 2006

See website (www.iras.uu.nl) for further information.

XXVIII International Symposium of the ISSA Construction Section on Occupational Safety and Health in the Construction Industry, Salvador, Brazil, 22–24 March 2006
The theme of this symposium is “Learning from the past to develop improvement strategies for the future”. Topics are:
- Implementation of occupational safety and health management systems and improvement strategies
- Improvement strategies for practical prevention solutions regarding different risks
- Improvement strategies for health in construction
- Occupational safety and health training of all those involved in the construction process.

Further information is available from: FUNDACENTRO Divisão de Eventos Rua Capote Valente, 710 05409-002 São Paulo – SP – Brazil Tel: (+55) 11 3066 6323; (+55) 11 3066 6116 Fax: (+55) 11 3066 6251 Email: aiss2006@fundacentro.gov.br

IEA-EEF European Congress of Epidemiology, “Epidemiology and Health Care Practice”, Utrecht, Netherlands, 28 June–1 July 2006
This IEA-EEF congress is organised by epidemiologists from Utrecht University, in collaboration with the Netherlands Epidemiology Society. The congress will encompass a broad range of themes from the fields of Epidemiology, Public Health, and Research in Health Care.
Email: euroepi2006@fisu.uu.nl
Website: www.euroepi2006.org
Child health and the environment

D Walters

*Occup Environ Med* 2005 62: 422

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