The growing appreciation of the limitations and cost of conventional treatment of cancer has led to the inevitable conclusion that cancer prevention must receive much more attention than it has in the past. As a response, in early September 1976, a conference was held at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, New York, and Origins of Human Cancer is a summary of this meeting. These proceedings, covering some 1960 pages, are divided into three parts.

Volume A starts with a fine introduction on the subject of human carcinogenesis by Sir Richard Doll. This is followed by sections, each devoted to a number of papers on a common theme, for example the effects of geography and genetic background, and changing patterns in cancer incidence. The section on the effects of occupation has a short paper on the carcinogenicity of chloroethers, the results of long-term and painstaking biocassays of vinyl chloride carcinogenesis, and useful summaries of the epidemiological evidence of cancer-inducing effects of metals. This is followed by sections on industrial and agricultural chemicals, air and water pollutants, and drugs, and emphasises the need for constant surveillance. The development of tumours of the female genital tract after prenatal exposure to diethylstilboestrol, and of adenomas of the liver in women taking oral contraceptives are only two examples of tumours associated with chronic drug usage. The carcinogenic effects of medical irradiation are summarised, and there are interesting papers on the role of diet in human cancer induction.

Volume B examines in detail the mechanisms of carcinogenesis, and particularly the role of carcinogens acting as mutagens which may require metabolic activation before they can exert their effects. The viral theory for the origin of human cancers is not as popular as it was in the past, the decline being partly attributable to the ascendancy of chemical carcinogenesis, the failure to isolate Type-C viruses in humans, and the questioning of the concept of immunosurveillance. Attention is given to the process of promotion as an oncogenic phenomenon and the need for further research into embroyogenesis.

Volume C deals with cancer prevention, the difficulties of carcinogenesis testing and some possible dietary carcinogens. It concludes with public policy panels focussed on three case studies of substances that have been banned, partly or wholly, in the United States (diethylstilboestrol, cyclamates, and dieldrin) in which the difficult choices to be met are discussed by representatives of industry and government, scientists and news media.

Origins of Human Cancer is the most complete account of human carcinogenesis to be published and must find a place in all cancer research laboratories. Large sections will be of interest to clinical oncologists, epidemiologists and specialists in industrial health, and at a cost of only 45 dollars for the set of three volumes, it is a real bargain.

R. G. B. EVANS


How do you write a book about occupational health? This question has exercised the minds of a number of people over the years and different approaches have been adopted by different authors.

In essence two ways are most commonly used: the subject can be viewed as a description of the clinical syndromes associated with particular hazards (Donald Hunter's book fits this mould); or the author can concentrate on the practice of occupational health (Richard Schilling's book is of this genre).

A third way would be to look at occupational diseases as organ dysfunction and to write a book in the manner of standard clinical texts, reviewing occupational causes for respiratory disease, neurological disorders, etc. Some recent attempts to combine these different perspectives have led to bulky indigestible tomes which satisfy no-one, particularly the clinician interested in the differential diagnoses of occupationally related disorders.

An attempt has now been made to answer the clinicians' request. Occupational Diseases: a Syllabus of Signs and Symptoms is divided into three sections. The first lists the occupational causes of symptoms and signs by Abdominal Pain to Wrist Pain. Some entries, like Corneal Staining, catalogue only six causes, while Liver Damage boasts over one hundred. The second section is restricted to toxic causes of occupational illness and is another alphabetical review of substances from Amin to Zirconium. The final section lists the common names for occupational diseases and their

JOHN ASHBY