Book reviews


This comprehensive book is designed to facilitate diagnosis of disease from the appearance of the chest radiograph. The provision of a review copy of volume III alone (from a text extending to four volumes) presents the reviewer with an almost impossible task; but consultation with the first edition in the local library has helped to put this volume in perspective. The complete text is a summary of the vast experience of the two authors in interpreting chest radiographs, and must be a required book of reference in radiological departments of all large hospitals. The tables of differential diagnosis constitute volume IV and refer the reader to descriptions of disease contained in volumes II and III. Volume I is concerned with radiographic techniques, the normal radiograph, and developmental diseases. Volume III contains descriptions of pneumoconioses, chemically induced lung diseases, and diseases of the pleura. By and large it is only these conditions that are of interest to the occupational physician, and he will find their discussion to be rather sketchy and superficial; but copious references, numbering nearly 10 000 in all, are given in the text.

The occupational physician, however, is not faced with the problem of deducing an occupation from a chest radiograph, which is the purpose of this book. Thus, excellent though this book is, it cannot be recommended for purchase by occupational physicians. On the other hand, it can be said to give the radiologist a competent and succinct introduction to occupational causes of abnormal chest radiographs.

G L LEATHART

**Environmental Health Criteria 8: Sulfur oxides and suspended particulate matter (Pp 108; Sw fr 10); 9: DDT and its derivatives (Pp 175; Sw fr 16); 10: Carbon disulfide (Pp 100; Sw fr 10); and 11: Mycotoxins (Pp 127; Sw fr 11).** Geneva: WHO, 1979.

This series of Environmental Health Criteria is proving to be a most valuable addition to the libraries of all those interested in environmental health. Each volume gives a succinct review of sources, chemical pathways, metabolism, toxic effects in man and animals; recommends safe levels of exposure; and makes a number of suggestions for future research.

The four volumes reviewed here are excellent starting points for students and others coming newly to the field and who wish for a comprehensive review of current knowledge. For the environmental specialist, these volumes are essential reading, and it is to be hoped those which follow maintain the same high standard.

H A WALDRON


Dr Poulton is an ergonomist with the MRC Applied Psychology Unit at Cambridge. As he says, this book provides a straightforward description of working environments and of their effects on people, with emphasis on efficiency and comfort. He also says that the book is restricted to the environments in which ordinary people may find themselves at work. While topics do include standard considerations of lighting, noise, heat and cold, and pressure, few ordinary people find themselves working 90 m under water or 600 m up in the air. Even fewer of us will find ourselves on a life raft or surviving free falls of 300 m into deep snow. Still less will we withstand "the extreme limit" of deceleration for a man facing forward in an experimental car crash—25 g in—second. "After impact he (Stapp) was confused, like a boxer who has just been knocked out.... Most affected were his eyes, which were almost dragged out of their sockets. He felt a tearing pain, as if one of his back teeth was being extracted without an anaesthetic.... But he survived...." Beeding in New Mexico survived 80 g for 0-04 second facing backward.... These were brave men." Just so. And splendid to read about, however extraordinary their work.

There is a chapter on harmful atmospheric pollution with paragraphs on dust and fibres (silica, asbestos, cotton), metals (lead, mercury, arsenic), chemicals, gases, methods of investigation and control, TLVs, monitoring, education, ionising radiation, and harmful electromagnetic radiation. All this in under 20 pages, and hence simplistic to the point of falsity. There is an entertaining chapter on physical exertion. "The efficiency of the brain is reduced during and immediately after intense exertion, owing to the shortage of oxygen. The effect is smaller in ultra-fit men." And, as throughout, experimental evidence is given. Conversely, "The brain functions most efficiently in jobs that require a certain amount of physical work. A person who sits still without moving tends to drop off to sleep. . . ."

Finally, there are chapters on work overload and underload, night shifts and loss of sleep, multiple stresses and multiple tasks, and perceived dangers. Thus 20 recruits under test were told their aircraft would have to ditch in the sea; five were not taken in but the remaining 15 had impairments of 10% and 45% on two tests. One is glad to read that in English-speaking countries such experiments are now regarded as unethical. A modern version of "Go East, young man?"

For whom is the book written? The blurb claims it is for all people who go out to work or work at home—professionals, managers, foremen, union representatives, and especially trainees for these jobs. Certainly it is simply written, except for the graphs which require much mental effort. Such a vast field is covered, however, from the commonplace to the esoteric, that it is not specially suited to anyone. But it is a very entertaining read and contains something to interest everyone. Who knows that surface grazing lighting is good for finding dropped buttons; that noise masks the inner speech used in thinking; that lighting codes are related to what countries can afford (and why not TLVs too); that subjective
judgements of stress are biased by the “central tendency of judgement”—what is acceptable depends on what you are used to? But what physician would agree that barbiturates are the best sleeping tablets for people who have to sleep during the day; that years of work overload increases the chances of a coronary thrombosis; that eye-strain and headaches may be due to refracture errors?

Though the author is MRC, Cambridge, the publisher is Springfield, Illinois, and the writing is American English: “gotten,” “enlisted man,” “traveling,” “fiber,” also “helping to update” and “to bring it into line with present-day thinking.” But I hope it is successful on both sides of the Atlantic. M K WILLIAMS


The Employment Medical Advisory Service commissioned this review “to undertake a critical analysis of the major publications in an effort to arrive at some acceptable conclusions and to outline directions for future work.” Harrington has succeeded in doing this in a detailed but concise and well-presented report that covers shift work practices; evaluates the health effects; studies the influence of, and the effects on, social, domestic, and environmental circumstances; outlines criteria for optimal shift work practice; and makes some useful conclusions and recommendations.

No new conclusions are arrived at about the health consequences of shift workers, and, indeed, the report contains fewer than do some of the papers reviewed. It is pleasing to see the ruthlessly objective critical analysis to which these studies have been subjected since many seem to have been poorly planned. Not all the criticism is negative, however, and due credit is given to the work of P J Taylor, A Aaronsen, and P Andlauer among others.

Only two of the 27 papers specifically concerned with sickness absence suggested that absence from work was higher in shift workers, and, indeed, many studies suggested a lower incidence of sickness absence, but whether or not this is due to self-selection of the workers has not yet been adequately established. Undoubtedly shift work does interfere with normal circadian rhythms causing measurable biochemical change but again significance and consequence of this disruption has not been clearly established. This is apparent among shift workers, which may be related to the lack of good catering facilities at night and the altered dietary habits associated with night shift.

Generally there is agreement that sleep disruption does occur in night shift workers and the vague concept of fatigue is frequently mentioned, although ill-defined in the papers reviewed. Certainly efficiency and performance are undoubtedly affected in such circumstances, and some papers have suggested that the accident rate is higher at night than during the day.

Some criteria for shift-working practice are outlined and comment is made on the importance of appropriate selection of the workers for the job. The overall conclusion is that there is little evidence as yet that shift work adversely affects health, but many questions remain unanswered, and carefully planned longitudinal studies are required both of shift workers and ex-shift workers. Clearly there have been far too many uncontrolled observations and “an astonishing lack of critical evaluation.” Social, domestic, or religious considerations affect people working on shift work, and these are undoubtedly important but often neglected in employers’ considerations.

One-fifth of the workforce in industrialised societies have to undertake shift work. This report provides a good summary of the current literature, makes some pertinent observations and useful recommendations, and would be well read by employers and unions as well as occupational physicians. It is to be hoped that having commissioned this excellent report the Employment Medical Advisory Service will be active in following up the recommendations for further research.

E W MACDONALD