BOOK REVIEWS

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This indigestible book is packed with scientific papers covering topics as diverse as physiology, experimental psychology, ergonomics, epidemiology, etc. The recurring theme is that 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 retirement workers who are delaying 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. There are well illustrated essays 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 anyone who formulates and maintains 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

Occupational Neurology and Clinical Neurotoxicology. By MARGIT L BLECKER. (Pp 384; one book review, Chapter 9) and the 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 onto the "rapidly developing specialty of occupational neurology". Thus they bring together into one book, chemicals 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 the book a bit confusing.

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 15) 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 major sections are 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 obtain the 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 epidemiological practice.

Assessment of exposure (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 work-related neuropsychiatric, endocrine, respiratory, and dermal effects, 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 neurological testing, with brief descriptions of the various ancillary tests in current use. Neuropsychological tests used in assessment are covered (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 neuromedicinal compounds, human exposure, and clinical manifestations.

Chapter 11 by Buckle 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 with epidemiological and mechanical formulae aimed essentially at prevention and advice for the occupational physician.

Chapter 10 "Interaction of Medical and Legal Systems" is entirely American based, 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 into readable copy, 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 and understanding of psychiatric disorders relating to toxins and occupational exposures, and the section on ergonomics and mechanical effects could well be hived off into a separate smaller section.

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 psychological 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 examinations.

COLIN JUNIPER

*Occupational Safety Health Administration (OSHA), National Institute for Environmental Health (NIOSH), American Conference of Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH), Threshold Limit Values (TLVs). Maximal Arbeitsplatzkonzentrations (MAKs)


This is a fascinating short volume on how to present data to policy makers. The author is a distinguished health policy expert and a former Dean of a Medical School. In his later years he became interested in epidemiology and its use in the investigation of the health effects of air pollution. The book deals with five major topics, air pollution, 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 in relation to the problems of risk assessment