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BOOK REVIEWS

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Work and Aging; A European Perspective. Edited by: JAN SNEL, ROEL CREMER. (Pp 417, price £24.50). 1994. London: Taylor and Francis. ISBN 0-7484-0165-2.

This indigestible book is packed with scientific papers covering topics as diverse as physiology, experimental psychology, ergonomics, and many others. The unifying 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 mature workers, thereby 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. I found greater fascination in 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 those who formulate 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

Occupational Neurology and Clinical Neurotoxicology. By MARGIT L BLEECKER. (Pp 384; price £67) 1994. Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins. ISBN 0-683-00848-X.

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 evaluation, 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, 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 the juxtaposition 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 11 to 15) at physical forces 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 main section begins 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 analyse and interpret 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 and dose (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 solvents, liquids, metals, pesticides, 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 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 neurotoxic compounds, human exposure, and clinical manifestations.

Chapter 11 by Buckle from the Robens Institute in the United Kingdom begins the second main section (chapters 11–15). 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 mathematical 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 reader.

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, by 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 occupation expands, then the section on ergonomics and mechanical effects could well be hived off into a separate publication.

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 exam.

COLIN JUNIPER

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

†Maximal Arbeitsplatzkonzentrationen (MAKs)

Environment Health Risks and Public Policy: Decision Making in Free Societies. By DAVID V BATES. (Pp 117; price \$US30 (cloth) \$US13 (paper)) 1995. Washington: University of Washington Press. ISBN 0-295-97336-6 (cloth) 0-295-97337-4 (paper).

This is a fascinating short volume on how to present data to policy makers. The author is a distinguished pulmonary physician and 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 approach the problems of risk assessment