Thorax 1989;**44**:764

Book notices

Bronchitis IV. 4th ed. HJ Sluiter, R van der Lende. (Pp 391.) Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1989. ISBN 90 232 2406X.

This book contains the proceedings of the Fourth Bronchitis Symposium, a multidisciplinary guest symposium on obstructive airways disease held in The Netherlands in May 1988. The central theme of the symposium was the "Dutch hypothesis" on the aetiology of obstructive airways disease, which was first promoted nearly 20 years ago at the previous symposium in the series. The contributors include many of the world's foremost research workers in the epidemiology, pathogenesis, and treatment of asthma, chronic bronchitis, and airflow obstruction, many of whom present a synthesis of their own work rather than a full "state of the art" review. As a result the book does not provide a definitive series of reviews (indeed, many of the contributors have already presented more comprehensive reviews elsewhere), but it does provide a clear synopsis of the contributions and current interests of some of the leading research workers in this subject over the past few years. By steering away from a series of arid reviews in favour of short, well written articles by interested and enthusiastic contributors from a diversity of research disciplines the book achieves a general overview that is readable, enjoyable, controversial, and accessible. On first looking through the book I was dismayed to see that the editors had opted to include short but verbatim transcripts of the discussions that followed the presentations, but these sections also proved to be informative and enjoyable, not least for the somewhat less concise and careful use of English than that of the lectures. One does not often meet phrases like "If sputum were urine we would not be in the pickle which we are in today" in a medical text. I suspect that most respiratory research workers with an interest in airflow obstruction, regardless of experience, will learn from and enjoy this book.

Non-occupational Exposure to Mineral Fibres. J Bignon, J Peto, R Saracci, eds. (Pp 529; £45.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. ISBN 92 832 1190 1.

Why does asbestos attract so much attention? As a cause of death, it pales into insignificance compared with motor cars, alcohol, and cigarettes. Yet the asbestos industry is being put out of business, bringing crashing down with it even those so called "names" at Lloyds who have helped carry its risks, while the producers of those in many ways much less useful items continue to make big profits for their shareholders. I suspect one, somewhat unpalatable, reason is that asbestos caught the attention of fashionable science. Here was something that killed, not in a rather direct and obvious way as a punishment for individuals' folly, but in a mysterious way, picking out innocent workers and causing cancer years later. Scientists wished to find why and how, made discoveries, attracted the attention of the media, and provided a table of rich pickings for politicians and lawyers. And let us not forget doctors. Those of you who take an interest in medicolegal matters will want to read this book, because it tells the most up to date story of asbestos and other mineral fibres and their relations to disease. In fact, it is the edited proceedings of the Lyon 1987 conference on non-occupational exposure to mineral fibres, and considers what is known about asbestos, man made fibres, and erionite. It is divided into sections on experimental studies, where fibres are making important contributions to understanding carcinogenesis; on the problems of measuring fibres and the concentrations to be found in different environments and in lungs; and on epidemiology and risk evaluation. It includes several very useful state of the art reviews as well as original contributions. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in research on fibres or concerned with medical implications of exposure to new fibres. It will be of interest to anyone curious to know why so many more people are studying fibres scientifically than are dying of their effects—they are such an interesting subject! Do you know what size and shape fibres are most dangerous? Which is a greater risk—death by lightning or environmental asbestos cancer? Why do rural Turks and Cypriots get mesothelioma? Why do glass fibres and chrysotile not cause mesothelioma—or do they? What is attapulgite, and why worry about it? How do we guard against future risks from asbestos substitutes? These are some of the questions addressed. For a record of conference proceedings this is an interesting book.—AS

Notice

Courses in epidemiology and biostatistics

The National Heart and Lung Institute, Brompton Hospital, offers four courses in epidemiology and biostatistics in 1989–90: principles of epidemiology (16–20 October), introduction to biostatistics (20–24 November), design of experiments, trials, and clinical surveys (7, 14, 24, and 28 February), data management and computing (14–16 May). No previous training in epidemiology or statistics is necessary for the first two courses. Further details from the Postgraduate Centre, Brompton Hospital, London SW3 6HP.