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Book notices

International Trends in General Thoracic Surgery — Volume I: Lung Cancer. NC Delarue, H Eschapaspe. (Pp 315; £47.25 hardback.) Philadelphia: WB Saunders, 1985. ISBN 0-7216-1349-7.

The scope of this initial volume in a new series on general thoracic surgery is indeed international and broad. Although certain chapters are purely technical (the procedures of choice for tumours of the chest wall and the main carina and the occasional role of surgery in superior vena caval obstruction), there is much of general respiratory interest. The volume begins with histogenesis and moves through considerations of the merits of staging lung cancer, mediastinoscopy, preoperative assessment and the management of occult tumours. Although the list of contributors is distinguished some of the contributions merely summarise the data from the particular unit and much of the presentation is personalised, which limits its value slightly in the context of the problem as a whole. This is balanced in some areas of controversy by a few pages of critical discussion from another centre. The volume covers the whole of surgery thoroughly for non-small cell lung cancer and then includes sections on small cell cancer, discussing chemotherapy alone, preoperative and postoperative chemotherapy, interferon treatment, and the role of monoclonal antibodies. The book is unusual in that the contributions are based on individuals' experience and therefore many controversial statements go unchallenged. It is, however, presented with up to date, very adequate references. All in all the problems that beset those trying to improve the outcome for patients with lung cancer are clearly outlined.

Asthma: Clinical, Pharmacology, and Therapeutic Progress. AB Kay. (Pp 412; figs; £42 hardback.) Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1986. ISBN 0-632-01465-2.

This book consists of a compilation of the lectures given in November 1984 at the annual course on the pharmacology of asthma at the Cardiothoracic Institute, London. It consists of 33 chapters, from 60 international contributors, designed to give a "state of the art" update on mechanisms of asthma and the mode of action of the drugs most commonly used in its treatment. The emphasis through much of the volume is on areas of "current" research interest and several chapters are basically preliminary disclosures of research data, much of which has subsequently been published in full. What would undoubtedly have been a stimulating strength of the course in 1984 tends to detract from the book 18 months later, and these elements might more purposefully have appeared more rapidly as a proceedings supplement of a respiratory journal. In other ways too the balance of interest, though reasonable in 1984, now seems dated—for example, three chapters and 32 pages on leukotrienes and only one chapter and exactly a third of the pages for prostaglandins, with little mention of recent interest in the latter's possible role in the late asthmatic reaction and induction of airway hyperresponsiveness, or in the role of PGE₂ in control of airways smooth muscle. Nevertheless, despite these criticisms the book succeeds well in its general strategy, and even in the areas in which knowledge is advancing rapidly—for example, asthma as an inflammatory airway disease, the possible and presumptive mechanisms are clearly described. In the more established areas of mast cell and smooth muscle physiology, pharmacology, and therapeutics the volume includes excellent review chapters. The book is easy to read and generally very well illustrated and has numerous references. It should succeed in its aim of appealing both to the clinician and, at least as introductory reading, to the research scientist.—EHW