

aeroallergen *Alternaria alternata* may precipitate sudden asthma attacks. Interestingly, nine of the 11 patients described by O'Hollaren *et al* had suffered repeated severe acute asthma exacerbations.

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- 1 Agusti AGN, Montserrat JM, Agusti-Vidal A. Sudden respiratory arrest from asthma. *Chest* 1982;6:933.
- 2 Packe GE, Ayres JG. Asthma outbreak during a thunderstorm. *Lancet* 1985;iii:199-204.
- 3 O'Hollaren MT, Yunginger JW, Offords KP, Somers MJ, O'Connell EJ, Ballard DJ, Sachs MI. Exposure to an aeroallergen as a possible precipitating factor in respiratory arrest in young patients with asthma. *N Engl J Med* 1991;324:359-63.

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## BOOK NOTICE

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**The Health of the Nation: The *BMJ* View.** Edited by Richard Smith. (Pp 237; £9.95 (UK), £12 (overseas). London: British Medical Journal, 1991. ISBN 0-7279-0314-4.

Remember 1991? The government, running up to a general election, besieged by the health lobby and a rampant BMA, counter-

attacked with radical proposals for positive health—the green paper *The Health of the Nation*. The *BMJ* responded with a series of essays on the key issues. This paperback is a collection of these essays, covering a wide range of topics from rehabilitation to poverty and from medical genetics to aging, including cancer, asthma, and HIV infection. It is an easy to read handbook of public health. Most of the essays are spiced by the tensions of the time. While welcoming the initiative, few resisted the temptation to make political points and debate runs through the book. The recurring central critical comments were reflected in Peter Burney's paper on asthma: the failure to address inequality and socioeconomic factors; the arbitrariness of targets; the difficulties of case definitions and controversies about care and the demonstrated benefits of "good practice"; the need to focus on the environment and the social framework that makes it difficult for individuals to change their lifestyle, rather than on a disease and medical process; and the need for research. The chapter on tobacco showed nicely how government action by fiscal measures and change in legislation would achieve far more than health education. The section on HIV reflected the temptation to avoid those areas where measurement might be difficult. Events move on and after consultation the white paper contains only five key areas. Yet this book is more than just a vignette in the history of medical politics. It certainly deserves a place on postgraduate centre library shelves, but perhaps few disillusioned respiratory physicians will buy it. How could any government wishing to be judged by its actions as well as its words fail to ban tobacco advertising?—CWGT

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## NOTICES

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### Congress of the Asian Pacific Society of Respiriology

The third congress of the Asian Pacific Society of Respiriology will be held on 7-10 October 1993 at the Mandarin Hotel, Singapore. It is being organised by the Singapore Thoracic Society under the auspices of the Asian Pacific Society of Respiriology. Further details from the Secretariat, Third Congress of the Asian Pacific Society of Respiriology, 336 Smith Street, 06-302, New Bridge Centre, Singapore 0105 (fax (65) 2270257).

### Bronchitis V symposium

The Bronchitis V international symposium is on the theme "Advances in the understanding of asthma and chronic obstructive lung disease." The symposium will be held on 9-11 June 1993 in the Martini Hall Congress Centre at Groningen. The main themes of the symposium are: morphological aspects; cellular interactions; natural history; modification of disease outcome; novel therapeutic perspectives. Further information from CARA Research Group Groningen, University Hospital, Department of Pulmonology, 59 Oostersingel, 9713 EZ Groningen, The Netherlands (telephone 31 50 612357; fax 31 50 124614).