Book Reviews

Modern Concepts in Brain Tumour Therapy: Laboratory and Clinical Investigations, National Cancer Institute Monograph 46. (1977) U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare. 250 pp.

This volume consists of papers presented at a conference on brain tumours held in 1976, and it is of considerable interest to all those many scientific and medical disciplines interested in the problems of these tumours.

In the first section the development of animal tumour models by exposure to different types of oncoviruses and chemical carcinogens which will produce histologically similar tumours to those occurring in man, and their use as models to study the effect of anti-tumour agents, both radiation and chemotherapy is described, as well as fundamental research into pharmacokinetics, tumour cell kinetics, immunology and the blood-brain barrier. All are features of great importance in planning for successful application of chemotherapy to brain tumours, but warnings are also given that information from these animal models may not be transferable to man, e.g. procarbazine produced no response in animals whereas it has an antitumour effect in man.

The next section looks at the pathology of the brain tumours, and one paper compares that of the animal tumour models to that found in man. The difficulties of pathological classification in such a protean group of tumours is stressed.

There is a good paper on the radiation damage to normal monkey brain with different single and fractionated doses. With megavoltage, 1000 rad as a single dose and 4000 rad in 4 weeks produced no damage, but above these doses considerable damage occurred. The changes in blood vessels and brain tissue following necrosis are described. Some of these changes are also described in the autopsies of patients treated for brain tumours.

The next section discusses the diagnosis of brain tumours, with particular reference to isotope scanning, and the newer technique of computed tomography with and without enhancement; both for diagnosis and continued evaluation after treatment. Other evaluation methods included the CSF measurement of desmosterol and polyamines.

The antigen-like compounds astrocytin and malignin are also described in this section.

The next section relates to the various treatment modalities used for brain tumours—the place of surgery, steroids, radiotherapy and chemotherapy, and possible use of hyperbaric O₂ for increasing the radiation effect.

The final section discusses prognostic factors, the criteria for response, and the problems relating to evaluation and diagnosis of definite tumour recurrence.

Finally, the Brain Tumour Study Group's various trials are described and, in more detail, the radiation therapy time/dose fraction trial for metastatic brain tumours.

This collection of papers brings together a good deal of useful information about brain tumours, and at present most of this has not been overtaken by later developments. A useful collection of papers on this subject.

D. Pearson

Breast Cancer—II. Advances in Research and Treatment—Experimental Biology. Ed. W. L. McGuire (1978) New York and London: Plenum Medical Book Company. 407 pp. £22.05.

This is the second volume in the only series devoted to breast cancer. The first dealt exclusively with therapy of the disease; this one covers aspects of experimental biology fundamental to our understanding of problems concerned with breast cancer, viz. aetiology, mechanisms of hormone action, cell kinetics, experimental therapy and biological markers. In addition, the volume contains a significant contribution from that elite corps, the molecular biologists, who have lately begun to investigate the mechanisms of hormone action in breast cancer.

The outcome is a comprehensive synthesis of concurrent research along several frontiers of knowledge. The standard of the individual contributions is not diminished by the multidisciplinary nature of the volume which is demanded by so complex a subject. In these days, when research projects in breast cancer,
as in most other diseases, are so highly orientated, the availability of a text which traverses the boundaries of the various disciplines is to be welcomed. The volume has the additional advantage of extensive bibliographies after each article. It is thus an excellent work of reference, as well as an up-to-date account of the status of breast cancer research.

M. MOORE

Opportunistic Infection in Cancer Patients. J. Aubertin, B. Hoerni, J. Y. Lacut & M. Durand (1978). U.S.A.: Masson Publishing. 197 pp. £15.80.

With advances in cancer treatments, particularly cytotoxic combinations, the prognosis in several tumours has improved considerably over the past decade. Not unexpectedly, this has in some instances led to increased toxicity, particularly in opportunistic infections. These are readily amenable to appropriate treatment, and can be resolved satisfactorily if the clinician is alert to the problem and instigates the correct therapy. This book therefore comes at an opportune time and presents an up-to-date review of important aspects in the management of infection in the patient with cancer.

The first section deals with general topics, in particular those factors that predispose to infection, and adequate coverage is given to aetiology and problems concerned with diagnosis. The second section deals with clinical and diagnostic aspects, and detailed coverage is given to the important opportunistic infections due to fungi and parasites. The final section is devoted to treatment, and adequate discussion is given here to current antibiotic policy. I think, however, that it would have given added credence to the book if more space had been devoted to supportive care. It is, however, a book that is to be recommended to all those concerned in the clinical management of cancer patients. At £15.80 it is probably beyond the reach of junior staff, but should be present in all relevant libraries.

P. M. WILKINSON

Endometrial Cancer. Eds. M. G. Brush, R. J. B. King & R. W. Taylor (1978). London: Baillière Tindall. 459 pp. £16.50.

This is not a text book, but the collected papers presented at the Second International Conference on Endometrial Cancer in May 1977. Forty-five papers gathered into 8 sections are republished without any of the attendant discussions or editorial summaries that one might have expected. The papers range from general reviews to individual scientific studies of widely varying size and complexity. The general introductions and discussions within the papers contain an extensive amount of overlapping information which, while complete within the context of the paper, is tedious if papers are read sequentially. The 8 sections cover the whole range of the relatively neglected field of endometrial carcinoma, with those on epidemiology, long-term oestrogen therapy, clinical treatment and experimental endocrinology occupying the bulk of the book.

Looking at the individual papers, in the first section there is an excellent review by Mack of the validity of the different arguments surrounding oestrogen therapy and the possible changing incidence of the disease.

The second section, on the relationship of oestrogens and carcinoma, opens with a balanced review of the problem by Lauritzen. His rules for long-term oestrogen therapy are impressive for their simplicity and common sense. The section then strays away from malignant disease to good papers by Sturdee and Whitehead, detailing the uterine mucosal response to different oestrogen therapies. The unpredictability of this response and the need for sequential analysis of endometrial tissue emerges clearly.

Ober’s Recent Ideas on the Pathology of Endometrial Carcinoma opens the pathology section. The clarity of style produces an authoritative view of this difficult field, which must not be missed by any clinically orientated reader.

The long section on Clinical Treatment includes papers discussing the extent of primary surgery, the relative values of pre- and post-operative radiotherapy, adjuvant progestogens in early disease and progestogens in late and recurrent disease. All the results presented come from clinical studies which seek to answer questions that can only be answered by randomized clinical trials. The points of view are well presented and cogently argued, but their long-term value is very limited. In later papers Kohorn does