

Allergy and Clinical Immunology. (Ed.) Richard F Lockey. Pp. 1193. \$35.00. Excerpta Medica: New York. 1979.

This tome is another attempt to produce a comprehensive 'immunology for everyman' with the intent of then presenting allergy against such a background. These 2 fields are given roughly equal space in this multiauthored work, close reading of which is daunted by cramped print, unimaginative layout, and unfortunately often poor expression.

The text itself is disappointing, being a rather didactic regurgitation of 'facts' with little attempt by most authors to integrate or reformulate their topic along other than conventional lines. Indeed much of the bulk of this book can be attributed to an excess of repetition. Over 100 pages in the allergy section are devoted to lists of drugs and do not succeed in providing a useful therapeutic guide.

The 4 chapters in the section on clinical immunology devoted to the rheumatic diseases exemplify the uncritical and often simplistic presentation of a mass of data. The best contribution made to the state of the art by this book is the penultimate chapter, 'Controversies in Allergy'. Although the opinions of one author, this chapter is extensively well referenced and sets a style which would have been a beneficial model for the rest of the book.

M. L. COHEN

The Aetiopathogenesis of Osteoarthritis. (Ed.) G. Nuki. Pp. 212. £15.00. Pitman Medical: Tunbridge Wells. 1980.

If it is true, as Professor Nuki states in his foreword, that formerly research interest in this field was severely limited by 'the concept that osteoarthritis was a single disease resulting from attrition of articular cartilage by the inevitable processes of ageing wear and tear,' rather than by an absence of the appropriate experimental ideas and techniques or by the academic fashions of the times, then an important function of this book should be to provide a better conceptual framework for future studies. How far does it succeed? Despite taking its origin from a symposium and comprising 17 chapters by some 30 authors who clearly did not see each others' scripts, a consensus does emerge.

Sokoloff in the opening chapter on pathology and the role of aging begins in earnest the assault on the old concept of a purely degenerative process by reminding us that a foreign-body giant-cell reaction to joint detritus occurs and may cause effusions. It provides evidence that articular chondrocytes are not a population diminishing with age but can replicate. Meachin's chapter rearranges similar material into a more formal schema.

Chapter 10, by Howell, full of fascinating speculations on possible aetiological biochemical factors, with its emphasis on the likely significance of cartilage calcification, might with profit have followed chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6, which together provide a valuable review of recent data on cartilage hydration, glycosaminoglycan dynamics, and sulphate incorporation studies from

diverse sources, including those on canine osteoarthritis, both naturally occurring and experimental. These sections help to establish the new multifactorial concept which is extended by clear, short accounts presenting the evidence for biomechanical aspects of causation, the role of inflammation and crystal deposition, and a possible role for the immunoglobulins and complement in certain polyarticular forms of the disease.

The volume concludes with J. S. Lawrence's masterly survey of geographical variance and Professor Nuki's own superb contribution on genetic predisposition. The latter offers the hope that, as a single primary abnormality is likely to be operating in each Mendelian disorder, identification of important individual causative factors may soon become a feasible objective. The volume is produced by offset lithography without justified (that is, straight) margins on paper which renders the histological figures indistinct, but is enlivened by a binding in the purple and white colours of the Scottish National Party tempered by a band of earthy brown. These features should not deter any rheumatologist from purchasing this stimulating and stylishly edited book.

ANTHONY G. WHITE

Annual Research Reviews: Low Back Pain. Vol. 1. Ed. R. Grahame. Pp. 106. £11.50. Churchill Livingstone: Edinburgh. 1980.

This slender handy volume contains 8 chapters contributed by 6 authors. It sets out to review all the relevant literature culled from the *Index Medicus* for the 18-month period from October 1977 till March 1979 and achieves this concisely. Being the first volume in its line the editor has helpfully allowed some leeway, and the reviews contain occasional mention of articles of importance outside the 18-month review period.

Each chapter has its merits. The epidemiology is expertly and critically analysed. Development and biomechanics are extended to the veterinary field. How lucky we humans are not to have a 'naked' spinal cord like the 'electric fish' but perhaps not so when we are told that this may in fact be an 'artefact' of tail regeneration. Connective tissues are eloquently discussed and pathogenesis of back pain and its investigation neatly noted. The editor himself takes on the task of reviewing the field of most interest to practising rheumatologists—that of conservative management. The result is a chapter of exceptional erudition. Surgeons and psychiatrists also make clear contributions.

The essence of this series is quick and accurate coverage and digestion of the literature. The review period ended in March 1979, and the editor of this journal received the book in March 1980. This rapid result has been achieved with a minimum of errors and reasonably clear typesetting, and the resulting book is recommended to all interested in research or practice on the field of 'dorso-pathies'. I suspect this first volume will be the basic building block of the series and am glad to have it on my shelf.

J. A. MATHEWS