

Book reviews

Living with Arthritis and Rheumatism. Audio cassette by Peter Taylor. Living Tapes Ltd., 44 Great Marlborough Street, London W1V 1DB. £4.75 (including postage and packing). 1980.

The audio cassette is nowadays very much part of our lives for music at home or on long car journeys, for dictation of correspondence or papers, and for educational purposes. Another feature of our present-day life as doctors is an increasing awareness of the need to educate our patients either by personal explanation or by books. In the field of rheumatic diseases we have handbooks for patients published by the Arthritis and Rheumatism Council as well as a number of other publications designed to inform the layman about his medical problem, a useful aim in these days of crowded clinics and surgeries, where adequate consultation time is all too limited.

The introduction of audio cassettes for patient education is therefore a natural development. This is one of 3 cassettes recently introduced by Living Tapes Ltd., the other 2 dealing with heart disease and giving up smoking. Future subjects to be covered will be diabetes, migraine, epilepsy, asthma, the old and bedridden, healthy eating, and alcohol.

'Hullo—this is Kenneth Kendall speaking!'—and so it is, the well-known reader of BBC television news bulletins lending his crisp friendly voice to give us half an hour on the rheumatic diseases with the same air of cheerful authority that he directs to news items on the Box every evening. Mr Peter Taylor is the actual writer of the piece.

After an introduction describing the meaning of words such as joints, rheumatism, and arthritis a number of individual rheumatic conditions are discussed: rheumatic fever (1 minute), osteoarthritis (6 minutes), rheumatoid arthritis (8 minutes), systemic lupus erythematosus (2 minutes), ankylosing spondylitis (1 minute), and gout (1 minute). A closing passage discussed the place of warmth, climate, physical aids, and organisations for the disabled. The writer bows to medical orthodoxy with repeated injunctions to trust the doctor: expensive remedies of unproved worth should be avoided.

The script is simple and clear and is free from serious error. It avoids being either too technical or condescending. Its treatment of the topics under discussion is necessarily superficial, and the only drugs mentioned by name are aspirin, antimalarials, gold ('a very ancient form of treatment') and steroids, although the multiplicity of pain-relieving drugs is implied.

Some statements ('overweight causes osteoarthritis'; 'rheumatoid arthritis is not caused by infection') are rather didactic, and one wonders what mental picture is produced by the term 'butterfly-shaped rash' without being told that it is situated on the face.

On the whole it is as well done as could reasonably be expected. The question at issue is whether the audio cassette is a more suitable medium of communication than books. The makers claim that 'this form of informa-

tion is much more easily assimilated than print,' but such affirmation may be doubted, except in the case of the blind or illiterate. Books are convenient and pleasant to handle; passages may be selected, read, and reread with ease; and above all simple visual illustrations and diagrams have great instructional value, particularly in the field of rheumatic diseases.

J. T. SCOTT

Arthritis and Rheumatism: The Facts. By J. T. Scott. Pp. 123. £4.50. Oxford University Press: London. 1980.

This book is one of a series written mainly for non-medical people to provide accurate information about various illnesses. The author has given the facts about the rheumatic diseases lucidly and truthfully. These facts are not very encouraging and no attempt is made to suggest that they are, but the reader should certainly gain understanding of his disease, which should make it easier for him to live with it, and certainly help the clinician treating him, who often has considerable difficulty in explaining the facts in a busy outpatients department. The book requires the reader to have reasonable intelligence to comprehend it fully and could with advantage be read as an introduction by nurses and medical students. The author does stress that it should not replace the usual textbooks for the latter, though I think that a good knowledge of this book would be more useful to medical students than the information on rheumatic diseases that most have when they qualify.

I was pleased to learn that the author has as much difficulty as I have when asked, 'Have I got rheumatism, doctor?' I believe that this well written book will be a great help to many patients and to those of us who try to treat them.

A. B. MYLES

The Joints and Synovial Fluid. Vol. 1. By Leon Sokoloff. Pp. 491. \$44.00. Academic Press: New York. 1978.

This first volume of a 2-volume treatise (the second will be available later this year) is a historic event. It updates our basic knowledge of the normal (and sometimes not so normal) joint from 1961, when Barnett, Davies, and McConnell published *Synovial Joints: Their Structure and Function*, to 1978—a period of unparalleled advance in new and sophisticated techniques in biochemistry, bioengineering, electron microscopy, immunology, and enzymology.

For scientists in this field this is an invaluable book both for reference (10 chapters, each with between 80 and 250 references) and for authoritative reviews. The authors are leaders in their own field, and the chapter headings include comparative arthrology (regrettably no mention of crustacea) embryology, fine structure, innervation, collagen, collagenases, cartilage biochemistry, macromolecules of synovial fluid, and lubrication, as well as an