Book Reviews

B. Raymond Fink, M.D., Editor


This latest volume in a continuing series is a compilation of 32 papers presented at a symposium on Endorphins held in Brescia, Italy, in August 1977. Virtually all of the acknowledged leaders in this new and rapidly moving field of neuropsychopharmacology are represented among the authors.

The first three papers are more general than the remainder. The first gives a concise up-to-date history of neuropeptide (not only endorphin) research, with an extensive bibliography. The second outlines the chemistry and regulation of neuropeptides, with reference to the interrelationships of the different endorphin molecules. The third, by Hans Kosterlitz and John Hughes, recounts in interesting style the historical events, only several years old, that led to the current exponential growth of endorphin research, as well as reviewing endorphin pharmacology.

Most of the remaining papers are reports of then-current research in the field and, as such, too highly specialized to be of interest to the general reader. Much of the information contained in these papers has already appeared as articles in scientific journals and, therefore, is already known to workers in the field. Nevertheless, the book is a rich source of references, and in many cases the individual papers by major research teams working with endorphins serve as a compendium of the course of research taken by them.

The book suffers somewhat from the effort toward rapid publication in order to be timely. Editing is uneven, with many typographical errors. Thirty-three pages of text were missing from my copy, making four of the chapters either absent or unintelligible.

This book is a reference work that will be of interest to neuropsychopharmacologists, those working in pain research, and those actively engaged in research related to endorphins. Because the physiological role of endorphins is still unknown, which is the raison d'être for the symposium and this book, it will be of little value to clinicians, except those with an overwhelming curiosity.

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This book contains the proceedings of a conference on chemotaxis held in January 1977. Forty-eight leaders in the field of chemotactic response from the United States and Scotland collaborated to produce this volume, and thus it represents the most current authoritative treatment of this important area of host defense.

The book's purposes are to serve "both as a reference of chemotaxis for scientists in basic and clinical laboratories and as a source of up-to-date information concerning the physiology of leukocyte locomotion." These purposes are largely achieved by dividing the book into five sections (Assay Systems, Cellular Physiology, Modulating Systems, Humoral Components, Abnormal Chemotaxis), each containing background as well as current and theoretical treatments of each topic. Critical discussion comments (pros and cons) by the participants are included at the end of each presentation, along with extensive and definitive bibliographies for additional reading. It is refreshing to find that information in newer areas of chemotaxis, such as structural and ionic events that occur during leukocytic chemotaxis, are dealt with, in addition to the traditional listing of chemotactic factors. Some clinically relevant data are included in the abnormal chemotaxis section.

The text in general is well written, and the book has good print, with carefully selected and produced figures, most of which depict laboratory data. In addition to its meticulous proofreading, a particularly strong point about this volume is its treatment of various assay systems for chemotaxis. This is one of the few places where all of the current chemotactic assays are presented together with specific materials, directions, and trouble-shooting hints for doing each of them.

By and large, it would seem that this book is most appropriate and valuable for the laboratory investigator researching current problems in chemotaxis such as granulocyte enzymic involvement or the role of lymphokines. There is little, if any, relevance for the practicing anesthesiologist, although three or four paragraphs are devoted to the effects of anesthetics on chemotaxis. Nonetheless, this book is an important addition to the field of chemotaxis, and deserves a place in libraries dealing with this subject and those of individuals who wish to gain a deeper basic science background in this interesting area.

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Instruments for analyzing and drawing spectral lessons from the past are as numerous as Monday mornings and usually come with a fudge factor as large as their bandwidth. The Comroe Retrospectroscope is different. It is a precision piece of equipment with an exceptionally broad field of view that produces observations of exceedingly high signal-to-noise ratio. Thanks to its superb eye-piece it emits brilliant spectra whose most distinctive feature is a profusion of bright lines on an informative background of provocative information. The objective determines how recent lifesaving advances in various branches of medicine and surgery have actually come about.

The records consist of a total of 28 readings culled from the pages of the American Review of Respiratory Disease. They start with a basic question, "What makes the sky blue?" (the answer helps one to see bacteria) and follow with the inside story about Roentgen's rays and two chapters containing 24 whydnots (and who)—why being mostly 'nastiable curiosity and therefore apt to seem frivolous to prying congressmen.

From retrospectoscopic examination of the single-breath technique we learn how research on a fundamental physiologic problem provided the basis for an important practical clinical test. To the question either mission-oriented or basic research, an answer is reached after Comroe performs his first arterial puncture on Bob Dripps. The answer is both, followed, of course, by how much of each?