Notes and activities

British Society of Gastroenterology Research Funds

Applications are invited for financial support for research, education and travel or equipment from the Society's research funds. For application forms and further information concerning specific guidelines, please contact the Honorary Secretary, University College Hospital, The Rayne Institute, 5 University Street, London, WC1E 6JJ. Closing dates for applications: 1 February and 1 August.

Italian Journal of Gastroenterology

Rendiconti di Gastroenterologia has changed its format and will now appear in English under the title *The Italian Journal of Gastroenterology*. The editor remains Professor Aldo Torsoli (Rome), who originated the venture 10 years ago. Professors L. Barbara (Bologna), G. Labo (Bologna), F. Maneti (Modena), F. Orlandi (Ancona), E. Pisi (Bologna), and V. Speranza (Rome) are associate editors.

The new journal will appear quarterly, under the sponsorship of the Italian Society of Gastroenterology and the Italian Association for the Study of the Liver. Professor Torsoli and his colleagues are to be congratulated on pioneering an Italian publication in gastroenterology, and now on producing it in a new impressive format, well up to international standards. We wish the enterprise good luck. The new journal costs \$40.00 per annum.

International Conference on Drug Absorption

This will take place in Edinburgh on 24 - 26 September 1979. The major emphasis will be on absorption from the gastrointestinal tract and the following topics will be included: physiological mechanisms, disease states and drug absorption, drug metabolism in the gut and 'first pass' losses, drug absorption interactions, pharmaceutical factors, novel drug delivery systems, and drug regulatory agency requirements. The programme will include poster sessions. Details from Mr. W. Campbell, University of Edinburgh Centre for Industrial Consultancy and Liaison, 16 George Square, Edinburgh, EH8 9LD.

Seventh International Symposium on Gastrointestinal Motility

This symposium, which will be held at Hueston Woods, Cincinnati, Ohio, 11-15 September 1979, provides an opportunity for the interdisciplinary study of the function and control of the movements of the alimentary tract in health and disease. Selection of papers for the programme will be made by the International Steering Committee from abstracts submitted. Clinical topics are particularly welcome. Abstracts of not more than 250 words should be sent to: Dr A. M. Connell, Division of Digestive Diseases, University of Cincinnati Medical Center, Cincinnati, Ohio 45267, USA, by 1 February 1979.

11th International Diagnostic Course

This course, on the abdomen, will be held in Davos, Switzerland, 1-7 April 1979. Details from IDKD, Post box 2132, CH-8028 Zurich, Switzerland.

Books

Topics in Dietary Fiber Research Edited by Gene A. Spiller. (Pp. 223. Illustrated. \$29.40.) Plenum: New York. 1978.

The final chapter in this book alone makes it worth obtaining. In it we are treated to a critical and scholarly account of the faecal constituents of prehistoric man. For those of us whose horizons are fixed firmly within the 20th century this brief trip through the world of coprolites, the intestinal contents of bogmen and desiccated corpses, is a revelation. Evidence is cited which indicates that dry faecal residue from around 10 000 years ago contained 30 to 56% as plant material with only 10% animal residue (mainly from small fish, birds, and rodents), suggesting a dietary fibre intake of around 130 g/stool (six to seven times the present United Kingdom intakes). Not that this guaranteed our ancestors a perfect bowel habit, since other papers cited suggest that the use of laxatives and enemas was widespread. These were necessary, apparently, to ease evacuation of 'coarse, bone-studded "faecal pellets . . . sometimes three inches in diameter"' which were so packed with seeds, etc. that they could be passed only with a great deal of difficulty.

This pleasure aside, the rest of the book is neither very readable nor does it cover

subjects which will be of much interest to the clinician. It is certainly not as good as its companion volume *Fiber in Human Nutrition*. The first half is given over to rather dull descriptive and methodological information on fibre analysis, bran, lignin, and pectin. The chapter on lignin is most authoritative and comprehensive, but few will find this half of the book compelling reading.

More worrying in a book of this type is the virtual absence of any mention of work published after 1975. It is evident that at least three of the chapters were written in 1973 or early 1974. One chapter cites nothing after 1970 and the work described by Hardinge on the diet and health of vegetarians was done 25 years ago. There is also considerable confusion over terminology in the book, despite the known interest of the editors in this. Taken together with the fact that 'fibre' values for wholemeal bread obtained by various methods described in the book are given as 1.6, 8.5, 15.5, and 10.6 g/100 g bread, those new to the field may find it difficult to follow the general arguments.

A book to borrow but perhaps not to buy.

J. H. CUMMINGS

Perspectives in Coeliac Disease Edited by B. McNicholl, C. F. McCarthy, and P. F. Fottrell. (Pp. 504. Illustrated. £14.95.) MTP Press: Lancaster. 1978.

This book is a full account of the Proceedings of the Third International Symposium on Coeliac Disease held at Galway in September 1977. The 51 papers, each followed by references and discussion, are gathered into 10 sections such as protein chemistry and toxicity, gluten toxicity and organ culture, genetic markers, immunology, gluten tolerance, malignancy and ulceration, and the skin. The result is a useful review of the growing points in the study of coeliac disease.

Though well edited, well indexed, well produced and, for the most part, well illustrated, its basic messages are determined by our present state of ignorance on the fundamentals of coeliac disease. This condition still has to be defined in terms of its response to treatment; we do not yet know the toxic fraction of gliadin; there is not yet agreement on the dose of gluten to use for challenge or on the criteria for mucosal relapse. There is even still some doubt on what is an abnormal mucosa in the first place.

The weaknesses are scanty and well localised. For instance, in one of the home team's contributions, claiming to show a reduction of gliadin toxicity by enzymic cleavage of a carbohydrate side chain, the key to the symbols in the figures is defective, nullifying detailed interpretation.

The chief strength is that this is a faithful piece of reporting, conveying the atmosphere in the discussions as well as accurately presenting the papers.

J. S. STEWART

Disturbances in Lipid and Lipoprotein Metabolism Edited by John M. Dietschy, Antonio M. Gott, Jr., and Joseph A. Ontko. (Pp. 295. Illustrated. \$25.) Waverley Press: Baltimore. 1978.

Most gastroenterologists will find something of interest in this book which is based on material presented at a Symposium on Lipoprotein and Lipid Metabolism sponsored by the American Physiological Society.

Much of the text is concerned with basic information about lipid metabolism. The early chapters cover lipid movement across biological membranes and, although there is a tendency for different chapters to duplicate information, this section is recommended as a lucid account of topics such as monomolecular diffusion and the unstirred water layer. The description of lipid absorption is excellent, as is the chapter dealing with the catabolism of triglyceride-rich lipoproteins to remnant lipoproteins. Thereafter, subsequent chapters deal with the synthesis of the various types of lipoprotein and the regulatory processes which are involved. A final section covers free fatty acid metabolism.

There are 16 chapters all of which are of a very high standard. The writing is lucid and concise, references are numerous and current and the text is complemented by useful diagrams. This book is thoroughly recommended.

I. A. D. BOUCHIER

Mucus in Health and Disease Advances in Experimental Medicine and Biology, Vol. 89 Edited by M. Elstein and D. V. Parke. (Pp. 558. \$54.00.) Plenum Press: New York and London. 1978.

The first international symposium on mucus in health and disease was held in Guildford in September 1976 and this book is a collection of the papers delivered on that occasion. There are sections on

mucus production and regulation; physical and chemical properties of mucus, and mucus in disease. Biochemists, biophysicists, and physiologists provide helpful surveys of their views of mucus. Gastroenterologists will find much of interest here. Particularly stimulating is the chapter by Jerzy Glass and Slomiany on derangements of mucus in gastric disease.

It is clear that much is known about mucus production, its biochemical nature, and physical properties. Equally, it must be said that the enquiring gastroenterologist will not find many answers to his questions about the function of mucus in the stomach and intestine in health or disease. Perhaps the next symposium, as there surely will be one, will address itself to these difficult aspects. Meanwhile, this book provides a useful up-to-date account of the state of the art.

L. A. TURNBERG

Glucagon: its Role in Physiology and Clinical Medicine Edited by P. P. Foa, J. S. Bajaj, and N. L. Foa. (Pp. 793. Illustrated.) Springer: New York. 1977.

Late in 1976 on the shores of a picturesque lake in the hills of Cashmere an international meeting on glucagon was held. This, the record of the proceedings, is an excellent summary of many diverse aspects of the subject. Glucagon has two main physiological roles, one in glucose homeostasis, by regulating hepatic glucose production and another as a powerful catabolic stress hormone causing hyperglycaemia, increased ketogenesis, and depressing plasma amino acid concentrations. It has only recently been possible to investigate the relative importance of these two roles by use of the glucagon inhibitor somatostatin and this work is thoroughly discussed. Also covered are the mechanisms that control glucagon release including the innervation of the α cell, effects of other hormones, and the relative importance of various metabolites. The importance of glucagon in disease, particularly diabetes, is well covered (this meeting was a satellite to the IXth International Diabetes meeting) and there is a section on pancreatic glucagonomas. The use of glucagon as a pharmacological agent is less covered but this may be appropriate as its many proposed uses are in reality poorly established. This is a most useful reference volume and, within the limitations of symposia proceedings, can be thoroughly recommended.

S. R. BLOOM

The Acute Abdomen for the Man on the Spot By J. C. Angell. (Pp. 116. £1.95.) Pitman Medical: London. 1978.

Management of the acute abdomen is well covered by textbooks, including those by Hamilton Bailey, Zachary Cope, Peter Jones, and John Shepherd. This short book by Mr Angell, however, provides something quite different. He has attempted to reproduce the teaching and advice that a registrar might receive from his chief on ward rounds, and he has succeeded outstandingly. It is no surprise to find that this popular book is now in its third edition, and pleasing that it still costs less than £2.

He gives colourful descriptions of his own cases, both the successes and the failures, and his skill lies in highlighting the diagnostic pitfalls that may occur. But it is his ability to think himself back to his own time as 'the man on the spot' that gives this book such immediate appeal to the junior registrar or houseman of today.

As well as his 'ward round' of the major surgical causes of an acute abdomen in their typical and atypical presentations, he gives many hints on the management of medical illnesses which mimic an acute abdomen, as well as suggestions on ordering investigations, eliciting physical signs, and on how he manages problem patients. He ends with a few thoughts on surgical technique. The whole book is written in so amusing and forthright a style that, however busy a registrar may be, he will have no difficulty in finding time to enjoy reading it.

J. P. S. COCHRANE

Brief Notes

Medical Acid-Base Balance: the Basic Principles By Michael L. G. Gardner. (Pp. 125. Figures. £3.95.) Bailliere Tindall: London. 1978.

Medical Acid-Base Balance was written primarily as an introductory text for preclinical and clinical students and is based largely on a course which has been taught to them over a number of years. It will also be useful, however, to anyone who needs to learn or relearn the principles of the subject.