Books

Clinics in gastroenterology Biochemical mechanism in gastroenterology Edited by TJ Peters. (Pp. 782; illustrated, £9.75). Philadelphia: WB Saunders. 1981.

The theme of this volume is biochemical mechanisms in gastroenterology and it encompasses topics related to normal digestion, absorption, and secretion as well as mechanisms of tissue injury, repair, and carcinogenesis. As a result, there is something here for everyone and without exception the chapters are well written, authoritative, and fully referenced. The complexity of some of the biochemical mechanisms – for example, those involved in the regulation of pancreatic secretion, the mediation of tissue injury, and the molecular pathophysiology of small intestinal sucrose-isomaltase – necessitate careful study and these chapters may be fairly heavy reading for clinicians and clinical scientists. It is to the credit of the authors, however, that they never attempt to oversimplify their accounts, so that biochemists and physiologist will find much to interest them.

Cell biology and biochemistry of the oesophageal epithelium is still in its infancy but this approach has promise in relation to the mechanisms of acid-pepsin and bile acid induced injury and potential in providing objective measurements which may aid rational therapy for oesophagitis. It represents a refreshing change from the standard manometric approach. Rees and Turnberg treat us to a superb and authoritative account of gastric secretion with appropriate equal emphasis on mechanisms of acid and alkali secretion and a clear exposition of the mucus-bicarbonate barrier and its pathophysiology. Dr Doe's chapter on mucosal injury was appealing because he avoided the standard lecture on gut immunology and emphasised the role of effector cells and the potential for non-immune activation of the inflammatory response. Many review articles on the topic of pathophysiology of fluid and electrolyte transport in diarrhoea have appeared in recent years but Drs Dobbins and Binder are at their best here with a most clear account which will be very valuable to the clinician and clinical scientists. Glucocorticoids are widely used by gastroenterologists and Dr Scott gives us a most competent review nicely combining clinical and biochemical aspects of his subject. The chapters on calcium, iron, and mucosal enzymes are all first rate and

include new information. The liver is perhaps under-represented in this volume but hepatic fibrosis is well discussed. Clinical carcinogenesis is perhaps too vast a subject for such a short overview but it would have been inappropriate to have produced a volume on biochemical mechanisms without including this important subject.

If the editorial board threw down a gauntlet to Dr Peters in suggesting this particular approach, he and his co-authors have responded in style and produced an exceedingly good book.

V S CHADWICK

Treatment of cancer Edited by H E Halnan. (Pp. 895; illustrated; £40.) London: Chapman and Hall, 1982.

This is a multi-author textbook (59 contributors in all, mainly from the United Kingdom and Europe), whose aim is to describe the optimal treatment of cancer, but it is by no means certain to whom this book would appeal. Some of the arguments for a definitive line of treatment are so dogmatic that unless the reader is already well-versed in the literature it would be difficult for him to get a useful critical view of any particular problem. Like many multi-author textbooks, the contents are extremely variable – some chapters are superbly written with good details of modern treatment, particularly radiotherapy, the best being on nasopharynx; others take a narrow line on treatment technique, such as the suggestion that after-loading of radioactive sources is only best achieved with the high dose rate obtained from a Cathetron. Some chapters are positively misleading – for example, in the one on the treatment of skin cancers some errors of fact are made because of misquoting of other authors.

The gastrointestinal tract is well covered in general terms, although is rather poor with regard to radiotherapy and chemotherapy. The latter is not really surprising, in view of the long gestation period this book must have had – perhaps five or six years. Nevertheless, there is some good general background reading on the subject. Radiotherapy treatment planning and radiobiology are well covered, but the important if neglected area of terminal care problems could be improved.

The text is relatively easy to read, but the print is small and the diagrams difficult to follow unless one has previous knowledge of the subject. There is an amazing lack of good radiographs, particularly CAT scans. The clearest text to read is the references, printed larger than anything else (perhaps because above all this is a good reference textbook!).

This is not a textbook for radiotherapists in