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Books

Handbook of experimental pharmacology. Vol 70: Pharmacology of intestinal permeation Edited by T Z Csaky. Part 1, (Pp. 708; illustrated; DM 464.00,) part 2, (Pp. 589; illustrated; DM 344.00.) Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1984.

Recollection in tranquillity is more impartial and judicious than are dispatches from the front line; thus, when it comes to publishing a magisterial overview of a scientific topic, there is a lot to be said for choosing one that is relatively dormant. Reviews in areas of explosive growth, such as gut peptides can be out of date before they are even published. To describe the study of intestinal absorption as relatively dormant is no reflection on the scientists involved, as all fields of study go through cyclical phases of relative growth and relative quiescence. The last 'golden age' of intestinal absorption, which lasted from the beginning of the fifties until the midseventies seems to have had three phases. First, there was the demonstration of active transport in animal intestine by pioneers such as Fisher, Parsons, and Smyth in this country and Code in the USA. Triggered by Hans Ussing's development of the isolated epithelial membrane preparation, there

followed a phase of rigorous mathematical modelling led by biophysicists such as Curran, Schultz and Curran. Finally, using the intubation techniques developed by Ingelfinger, there were the studies of human absorptive physiology, led by Fordtran, Soergel and Phillips in the USA, Dawson in the UK, and Bernier in France.

It is appropriate that this massive review of intestinal absorption is sponsored by pharmacologists; those who work on drugs have a vested interest in understanding the processes of intestinal permeation. The selection of contributors is catholic, covering many disciplines and countries, and includes many, such as Dawson, Parsons, and Turnberg from this country, who have made major contributions. Likewise, the range of topics is very wide. Newer methodologies, such as the use of vascular perfusion and of brush border membrane vesicles, are covered in depth, as are the classic methods on which current knowledge rests. The preoccupations of pharmacologists will be satisfied by chapters on topics such as laxatives, secretagogues, opiates, and heavy metals.

As is usual with this series, these volumes are edited and produced with care, and the price is astronomical. The question of whether an individual should spend the cost of an Aegean holiday on two books really does not arise. But because it is, to my mind, the best work of reference currently available in this important field, librarians will need to think hard about including it in their budgets.

DAVID WINGATE

Current therapy in gastroenterology and liver disease 1984–1985 Edited by T M Bayless. (Pp. 517; illustrated; £50.) St Louis: C V Mosby, 1984.

The 100 almost entirely North American authors writing in this book have covered all aspects of gastrointestinal biliary tract and liver and pancreatic disease. The sections tend to be direct and personal in style, which is refreshing, well indexed but sparsely or unreferenced. Problems of differences of drug names in the United Kingdom and North America seem less apparent than in general and particularly cardiorespiratory medicine and so do not interfere with understanding. There is, however, inevitable difficulty through the differential rate of drug approval. Thus cimetidine is discussed in some detail whereas ranitidine is hardly mentioned and chelated bismuth not at all. Coverage is also patchy. I enjoyed, for instance, the detailed treatment plans, the direct statement of problems and suggestions for resolution and found some sections, such as that on anorexia nervosa, full of excellent advice.

Among the cons, in the section on cimetidine interference with drug metabolism is mentioned but