

scattered. It includes an excellent appraisal of a number of papers published during the past year relating to changing patterns in the aetiology of cirrhosis and the effects of various treatment measures. Diagnostic techniques needed to establish cirrhosis ranging from the latest analysis of standard liver function tests to the more sophisticated imaging techniques, are also covered. There is also a very clear explanation of metabolic measurement by which liver function and mass can be assessed in quantitative terms.

The review by Hal Conn of the great deal of work in portal hypertension published during the past 12 to 18 months is a masterly one. The new studies on the control of acute bleeding from varices by pharmacological measures as well as the long term prevention of recurrent bleeding, are well analysed. What Conn does, and other authors do to a lesser extent, is not only to present sufficient data for the reader to make a valued judgement, but also to give their own critical assessment of the data and bias. There are also chapters on hepatitis and the serology of liver diseases which give a very good account of what are difficult areas because of the great volume of publications coming from different parts of the world.

This is not just a collection of abstracts of published papers, but a real overview of the literature and progress in hepatology. Furthermore, the editor claims that it has been possible to reduce the delay in publication from one half to one third of that taken usually with an annual review.

ROGER WILLIAMS

Functional disorders of the digestive tract Edited by W Y Chey. (Pp. 344; illustrated; price not stated.) New York: Raven Press, 1983.

This book proceeds from a conference held at Rochester, New York, though this fact is concealed in the preface. It must have been an exhausting meeting, with 40 speakers covering a very wide range of topics from satiety to rectal motility. Speakers treated their brief of producing a written paper with varying degrees of seriousness. Some conscientious ones wrote balanced and well referenced reviews (this is especially true of sections on the enteric nervous system) but most produced brief reviews of their own recent work with prints of their slides.

Despite the title there is far more physiology (peptides, nerves, motility, and electricity) than clinical material. The magnitude of the clinical problems was highlighted by Mendeloff: in 1976, 96 000 Americans were discharged from hospital with a main diagnosis of irritable bowel syndrome

(plus 19 000 with psychogenic gastrointestinal disorders). It is odd, however, to read a review of epidemiology in 1983 and find no mention of a prevalence survey published in 1980 (*Gastroenterology* 1980; 79: 283). Odd too, that IBS ('the big one') is relegated to the end of the book. Gas and biliary dyskinesia each put in an appearance but more important clinical problems like heartburn, non-ulcer dyspepsia, and simple constipation are barely mentioned. And does intestinal pseudo-obstruction really belong in this book?

One gets the impression that clinicians had little to say in planning this meeting and that there was little communication between clinicians and scientists. All in all, a book for the neuro-physiologist or motility man rather than the beleaguered clinician who battles daily with abdominal women.

K W HEATON

Surgery of the alimentary tract By R T Shackelford and G D Zuidema. (Pp. 705; illustrated; £49.00.) Eastbourne, E Sussex: W B Saunders, 1982.

This is an excellent book. It is very well written, is comprehensive and by its concise style has managed to keep its size within reasonable bounds. The printing is clear and the illustrations are good – although sometimes the relevant text does not appear on the same page which means some unwelcome turning of pages at times. By modern standards the price is average (£49).

This is the third volume of a three volume series, and although colonic and anorectal surgery is advancing very rapidly it manages to be virtually up to date in its contents. Tight editorial work has kept the style uniform, and there is a good balance to the selection of material. This volume would prepare a final FRCS candidate admirably, and would update a busy general surgeon with most techniques of proven value for treating diseases of the lower alimentary tract. A very tiny number of statements are controversial: the authors do not seem to have appreciated the latest evidence supporting immediate one stage colectomy for obstructing carcinomas of the colon, and there is no guidance for how best to resect colon cancers in difficult situations – for example, the splenic flexure area. It is also surprising to see subcutaneous alcohol injections still being advocated for intractable pruritis. Although the Koch pouch is fully described the 'pelvic pouch' operation (Parks procedure) is not discussed. Local procedures for low cancers of the rectum and anus (including radiotherapeutic methods) are inadequately discussed.

But these are small and peripheral blemishes which are partly influenced by the degree to which a surgeon has narrowed and refined his interests. This book covers the broad body of surgical practice admirably and is neither too radical nor too timid in its approach.

For those individuals or librarians who wish to enhance their shelves with an excellent survey of modern colorectal/anal surgery, this book is a very good buy.

C V MANN

Brush border membranes. Ciba Foundation Symposium 95 Edited by Ruth Porter and GERALYN COLLINS. (Pp. 340; illustrated; £25.) London: Pitman, 1983.

To many, including gastroenterologists, the brush border membrane may be considered as the digestive/absorptive surface lining the lumen of the small intestine. This volume, reporting the proceedings of an international symposium held in June 1982, reminds us that microvilli are found on many cell types and that the regular array of such protrusions of the cell surface to form a true 'brush border' is found in non-gastrointestinal epithelia such as the renal proximal tubule and placental chorionic villus. This raises the question of the function of this particular cellular specialisation: in this volume A J Kenny suggests that the *raison d'être* of the microvillus relates to the function of its membrane proteins – the hydrolases, transport proteins, receptors – and this book testifies to the impact of modern molecular biology on our understanding of some but not all (the transport proteins being conspicuous by their absence) of these molecules. An additional topic considered here is that structure which lies deep to the microvillus surface membrane, the cytoskeleton. All cells have such a cytoplasmic scaffolding of structural proteins but that which supports the brush border membrane is not only exquisite in its geometrical precision but also is isolated easily and in large quantities and for this reason the small intestine has become the model system used by those who are interested in its chemical composition. Although the dominant protein of the microvillus core is actin the current view is that microvilli are non-motile: nevertheless, calcium binding proteins (calmodulin and villin) are present in substantial amounts and may be involved in the assembly and disassembly of microvilli, a process that may be regulated physiologically and which also may be of considerable importance pathologically – for example, in intestinal secretory states of unknown aetiology which are briefly discussed by Schmitz. Of particular interest to those

whose only love is the healthy intestine will be the discussion by M W Smith of his observations on microvillus assembly as related to the development of digestive and absorptive function; that the expression of the former precedes the latter may serve to remind us that even when the molecular detail of membrane macromolecules has been unravelled using the marvellous techniques of gene cloning which are now available, in considering the role of such macromolecules we must always consider the physiological problems with which the intestinal epithelium is confronted. This volume, which will interest many cell biologists, should be of especial significance to those interested in the biochemical and ultrastructural basis of small intestinal function: it will cost them £25.

C A R BOYD

Cope's early diagnosis of the acute abdomen Revised by William Silen. (Pp. 284; illustrated; £7.95.) New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

It still seems a bit odd that a book produced by a British surgeon should be updated by an American, though no one would quibble about the choice of Bill Silen. Every student should read this book, though whether he will be prepared to pay the fairly modest £8 for such a small book is another matter. The book is certainly a good guide to the acute abdomen for students at a very early stage. It provides a logical method of looking at the problems of abdominal pain, but I am afraid I still have rooted objections to the inclusion of hyperaesthesia as something important. I have yet to meet a surgeon who uses it routinely and personally, I have never found it of much assistance.

While the brevity of the book is admirable for very junior students it really does not satisfy their needs as tested by a small uncontrolled trial. There are several other books where the student can read about the problem in greater depth and most of those that I have consulted want to do so. Perhaps a few references might be advisable though this goes against the credo of Zachari Cope's initial preface. As a book it is a good read, but if I were a student I would invest my money elsewhere.

CHARLES CLARK

News

International Symposium on Technical Progress in Endoscopy

This symposium will be held on 29 June 1984 in Erlangen. Further details from Priv Doz Dr J R