Book reviews

Hallucinogens: Neurochemical, Behavioral, and Clinical Perspectives. (*Central Nervous System Pharmacology Series.*) Edited by Barry L Jacobs. (Pp 247; \$61.50.) New York: Raven Press, 1984.

Hallucinogens have been utilised by man for centuries as part of mysticism or religion. Today, however, such substances are used socially and this abuse is a major current problem. The range of hallucinogens available has been extended from those which are natural plant products, such as mescaline, into synthetic drugs such as phenylclidine. Indeed, it is the latter group, and in particular, LSD and phenylclidine, which are most commonly abused.

For these reasons it is particularly relevant that the Central Nervous System Pharmacology series should contain a volume on hallucinogens. This is a well balanced book dealing with a variety of aspects of the pharmacology and biochemistry of hallucinogens in both animals and man. Not all aspects are covered but as the editor correctly comments such volumes are inevitably influenced by the interests of the editor.

Despite the considerable interest shown in the study of hallucinogens it is evident that their exact mechanism of action remains in doubt. This is perhaps not surprising since hallucinogens encompass a wide variety of different chemical structures. Central to the hypothesis of hallucinogenic activity has been effects on brain 5HT function which certainly hallucinogens possess. Clearly, however, many hallucinogens effect either directly or indirectly, the function of many other neurotransmitter substances. These include in particular, dopamine and in addition, noradrenaline, GABA and peptide systems. All these aspects of hallucinogen activity are extensively discussed in the various contributions. In all probability the conclusion drawn by a number of authors that hallucinogens need to disrupt several different transmitter systems to produce their effects is correct.

An enjoyable volume of wide interest. It provides the reader with a clear up-to-date insight into the complex area of hallucinogens research. Many individual readers will undoubtedly purchase this volume and certainly it will be purchased by libraries as part of this excellent series on centrally acting drugs.

P JENNER

Recent Research in Neurology. Edited by N Callaghan and R Galvin. (Pp 204; £20.00.) London: Pitman Publishing Ltd, 1984.

This is just a short (204 small pages) volume of papers originally presented at a conference in Cork. There are 21 separate papers by 31 contributors grouped into four sections, Parkinson's disease and Extra-pyramidal Disorders, Strokes, Immunology, and a general section. Some of the papers take the form of general updating reviews of the state of current knowledge on a particular topic, others are detailed accounts of specific research activities. There is a strong clinical orientation. Each paper has its own lists of references.

Though perhaps not an essential book for established clinicians in the neurological disciplines (who almost certainly will be familiar with most of the contents as a result of their other updating activities) this addition to the literature may be attractive to those in training. The latter, however, may prefer to use some of the more homogeneous and comprehensive reviews of recent knowledge and research which are currently available.

IMS WILKINSON

The Psychobiology of Anorexia Nervosa. Edited by KM Pirke and D Ploog. (Pp 200; \$29.10.) Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 1984.

This is a collection of papers given at a workshop held in 1983 which was convened to answer three questions:—

(1) Are the biological changes seen in anorexia nervosa merely secondary to weight loss or are some specific for the illness? (2) Is cerebral metabolism altered by weight loss? (3) Could these biological changes contribute to the pathogenesis of anorexia nervosa?

In order to discuss these questions the authors brought together experts from a number of disciplines, ranging from the biological to the clinical sciences. Thus Wurtman and Wurtman began by discussing the effect of food upon neurotransmitters. The argument then passed from the effect of starvation upon rat neurotransmitter function to neurotransmitter levels in anorexia nervosa as described by Ebert and others from Bethesda. Other aspects of brain structure and function in anorexia nervosa were also described, these range from PET scanning from the Max Planck

Institute, Munich, to neuroendocrinology summarised by Beumont. Although the majority of the papers concentrate on the central nervous system more peripheral organs are not forgotten and there are some interesting papers on gastric physiology. Crisp then discussed the use of psychopharmacological agents in the treatment of anorexia nervosa. Each author reviewed his own field clearly so that it is possible for those in other disciplines to follow the methodology and arguments easily. An important criticism of the book is offset by a compliment, the breadth of the field it covers and the depth of each paper should surely merit an index.

So have the three questions posed by the editor been answered? The editors have tried to distil for us non-attenders a consensus opinion derived from the conference and I would recommend that all those interested in the subject read the book themselves, and compare their conclusions to those which the workshop came to.

JANET TREASURE