Notices

Tenth International Symposium on Cerebral Blood Flow and Metabolism

June 19–24, 1981 (amended date)

St Louis, Missouri, USA.

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The Casey Holter Memorial Prize. This prize of £250 will be awarded in 1981 for the best essay reporting original work bearing on the pathogenesis or treatment of spina bifida or hydrocephalus. Entries should be submitted before 30th April 1981 to: Mr D G Young, Royal Hospital for Sick Children, York Hill, Glasgow G3 8SJ.

Book reviews

Ergot Compounds and Brain Function—Neuro endocrine and Neuropsychiatric aspects Edited by M Goldstein *et al* (pp 413; \$46.24.) New York: Raven Press, 1980.

Ergot drugs have been a treasure chest for pharmacologists. Their investigation led to some of the adventures in physiology of Sir Henry Dale and more recently has served as a powerful tool to study the monoamine nervous system. This well edited and presented volume reviews the many pharmacological actions and clinical uses of ergot derivatives. Thirty-nine chapters contain papers by 111 authors presented at a New York symposium in 1979. The index is good, the type clear and the illustrations informative.

There are five main sections. The first contains an excellent review of the diverse pharmacology of ergots by Berde, followed by the presentation of new research findings using techniques such as ibotenic acid lesions of the striatum to remove interneurons but leave extrinsic terminals intact. However, since ergot alkaloids may act at six or more distinct monoamine receptors in the brain, the analysis of these results is sometimes difficult. The book then reviews

the use of ergots in endocrine disorders, Parkinsonism, dyskinesias and old age. These sections draw on the vast experience and publications of many authors and form a useful compendium of present practice in the management of hyperprolactinaemia, acromegaly and extrapyramidal disorders.

Although I enjoyed the book as a whole, there are a number of drawbacks. The first section is complementary to the encyclopaedic handbook on experimental pharmacology of ergot alkaloids and related compounds edited by Berde and Schild and published by Springer-Verlag in 1978. This is three times more expensive than the present volume but an essential reference work. Many of the clinical results are duplicated in both volumes. The necessary decision by Sandoz to stop production and investigation of lysergic acid diethylamide and analogues in the 1960's following widespread abuse unfortunately curtailed the study of the psychotomimetic properties of ergot derivatives in man. This most interesting effect and also the vascular physiology of ergots are well reviewed in the handbook but not in the present volume. This however forms an excellent introduction to many of the different actions of ergot in animals and man.

JD PARKES

Interaction within the Brain-Pituitary-Adrenocortical System Edited by M T Jones, B Gillham, MF Dallman, and S Chattopadhyay (pp 293, £14.80) London: Academic Press, 1979.

This book is based on a satellite symposium of the 5th International Congress on Hormonal Steroids held at Varanasi, India, in November 1978. The authors of the 28 chapters were specifically asked to review their particular field, placing their own results in a broad context. This approach has been so successful that the editors have virtually produced a textbook rather than a collection of papers of limited interest. The content is chiefly experimental with a single chapter by Professor Rees directly relevant to the clinical management of Cushing's syndrome, but other authors consider such topics as adrenocortical function in psychiatric disorders and the possible role of steroids in foetal development and in hypertension.

Notwithstanding the emphasis on lab-

oratory work it is frequently stimulating to relate the results to clinical situations. In a chapter on behavioural effects of neuropeptides for example, Bohus points out that certain behavioural deficits after hypophysectomy in animals are only corrected by replacement therapy with ACTH and endorphins. Professor Edwardson in his contribution suggests a relationship between pituitary peptides and obesity. Perhaps the clinical impression of a change of personality and a tendency to gain weight in patients after hypophysectomy has foundation in hormonal deficiency.

A number of the chapters deal with the regulation of ACTH release and the mechanism of feed back control exerted by circulating steroids. Of particular interest to neurologists is the chapter by Gann and his co-workers who have explored the afferent neuronal pathways originating in the medulla which influence hypothalamic production of a corticotrophin releasing factor (CRF). Their technique involves hormonal measurement acting as the index of response to electrical stimulation of neurones. The neuroendocrine approach by Scapagnini *et al* to noradrenergic inhibition of CRF production has also provided an elegant demonstration of denervation supersensitivity.

The relationship between endocrine and nervous systems is further emphasised by chapters dealing with the role of neuro-transmitters in the control of hormone secretion. Professor Hodges for example, describes the inhibitory effects of acetylcholine and serotonin on CRF production.

Many other contributions illustrate the growing awareness of neuro-endocrinology as a subject of clinical relevance. Indeed ACTH and related peptides seem likely to achieve importance as neuro-transmitters equal to that achieved in their role as hormones. The book is well produced, well illustrated and can be recommended as a source of reference for the general reader as well as the specialist.

NF LAWTON

Myotonic Dystrophy by Peter S Harper (pp 331; £17.25) Eastbourne, England: WB Saunders Co 1979.

Harper's monograph on myotonic dystrophy is excellent. The previous standard reference of Caughey and