
This 70th volume of the Progress in Brain Research series contains the proceedings of the 14th International Summer School of Brain Research in Amsterdam in August 1986, and published over a year later. Since that time the research in this area has advanced considerably and particularly the molecular biology both of the putative familial Alzheimer’s disease gene located to chromosome 21 and also the elucidation of amyloid. The precursor of the amyloid deposits both within blood vessels and the centre of the senile plaque in Alzheimer’s disease has been elucidated, probes developed and the gene also located to chromosome 21. In the light of these important advances what can this book offer?

The main strength is that it presents a collection of reviews rather than simple research abstracts although there is clear variation in the general style. In general the authors have followed the instructions of the editors to review their subject and to relate clinical features to experimental animal data. Despite the recent advances the problems covered remain central to the area of Alzheimer’s disease and ageing. Chapters address the question of the role of the cholinergic abnormality and of aluminium both of which are still unresolved. Perhaps the most challenging of all is the relationship between so-called “normal ageing” in Alzheimer’s disease and whether cerebral ageing should be considered as a normal biological or pathological phenomenon. In this regard there is a short review by Terry on the pathology of the ageing brain which is helpful and there is also an excellent review by Frackowiak on cerebral imaging and dementia. Also notable is the chapter by Professor Van Crevel on the clinical approach to dementia. This is the first chapter and provides an excellent introduction to the subsequent less clinical papers. The discussion of how treatable are the treatable dementias and how far one should investigate for what may be a very small return contrasts with the optimism of the scientific data. The clinical caution which is exercised in relation to cerebral biopsies will change if significant benefit can be demonstrated for the patients. Until that time this book remains a good source of overall review although it is unfortunately a very expensive introduction to the subject.

M. Rossor


The growing interest in migraine is reflected in the presence of 500 symposists present at the biennial meeting and in the accompanying mini-symposia and satellite meetings of the International Headache Society and World Federation of Neurology Migraine and Headache Research Group. The organisation and prompt publication of the proceedings do credit to the experienced editor Frank Rose.

The publication spans 278 pages and 41 papers. It is divided into five sections. The first three deal with migraine pathogenesis, vascular aspects and therapeutics; the fourth concentrates on cluster headache and the fifth with other types of “idiopathic headache.” The contents inevitably vary in approach and value, ranging from a simple textbook type of survey of beta-blockers, through clinical trials of diacerein, nasal dihydroergotamine to scientific studies of asymmetries of blood flow (Levine, Welch et al) and critical hypotheses of for example sensory connections of cephalic vessels (Moskowitz; Edvinsson et al). Platelet and basophil studies are described, peptides, dietary tyramine and wine are updated and fluid retention, menstrual and endocrine investigations are still unresolved enigmas.

Newer techniques of single photon emission tomography provide useful information non-invasively, and spectral analysis and topographic mapping (Schoenen, Jamner and Delwaide) show interesting unilateral EES changes even in common migraine. It is pleasing to learn how much more data are accumulating, but its very diversity confirms the neurologist’s traditional view of migraine as a disorder of function with protean expression and multifactorial aetiologies. Thus, a unified explanation, or a series of identifiable mechanisms leading to rational treatment still evade us.

This book is packed with useful data. It is warmly recommended as a vital source of references for the migraine research worker. The clinician too, will be able to familiarise himself with all that’s new in the migraine world.

J. S. Pearce