mortality patterns recorded in this atlas but it is only in the chapter on "Spatial variations in mortality" (P B West) that these are discussed in any depth.

The validity and reliability of the mortality data are clearly important but receive rather limited attention. Measures of variability are not quoted and only SMRs "within the top tenth" are tabulated. The detection of changes over time are left largely to the eye, a slightly uncertain procedure. Comparisons between maps are difficult and some way of putting them side by side would have been helpful—though doubtless difficult and expensive to provide. The change in geographical boundaries between 1969–73 and 1979–83 compounds the difficulty in making comparisons—but these are hardly the fault of the authors!

In spite of these reservations this is an interesting volume which presents a wealth of data on Scottish mortality patterns. It will be of interest to those concerned both with the causes of disease and the provision of health services. Nor is its interest confined to Scotland—the ideas generated by these geographical patterns are likely to have wider significance. A copy should be made available in every medical reference library.

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Research and the ageing population. Ciba Foundation Symposium 134. Eds: David Evered, Julie Whelan (Pp 264; £28.95) Chichester: John Wiley, 1988.

This book was published as the proceedings of a symposium held to celebrate the centenary of the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, in April 1987.

The aim of the symposium was to review progress in research relevant to the care of elderly people and to consider its significance in planning for them. As such the book is an overview of research recently undertaken into the health related aspects of ageing.

The contributors represent some of the best known names in the field and each has presented either a particular study or a general description of his or her work. The contributors are excellent and are added to considerably by the discussions at the end of each section. As such the book would be invaluable to an epidemiologist or planner wishing to obtain a fairly full view of the ageing related issues, especially as the subject is rapidly expanding and likely to have more and more impact upon the care of older people, whether it be the exposure of fallacies about the differences between older and younger people with cancer or the possibilities of reducing the epidemic of

age related bone fractures. The references provide the opportunity for a fuller examination of the issues, if that is required.

As is usual with such groups there is some hypothesis building in the discussions, not always borne out by the available facts. The book demonstrates the huge areas of unknown territory in the field and the importance of trying to chart, at least, the main paths. As such the book should act as an important stimulus to researchers, and possibly even a government department or two, to realise the enormous potential for good that such research holds.

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Pigment cell 9. Melanoma and naevi: Incidence, inter-relationships and implications. Ed: J Mark Elwood (Pp 156; £56.90) Basel: Karger, 1988.

The latest volume of the Pigment Cell Series brings together the views of contributors from seven countries on the relationship between pigmented naevi and melanoma. The evidence suggests that control of melanoma is possible and programmes of prevention and early diagnosis are described.

Interest in moles has developed only in the last few years, as a result of the rising incidence of melanoma. Consequently the epidemiological information is fragmentary. Armstrong and English give a clear presentation of this information, while an interesting account of mole surveying in New Zealand makes the reader aware of the need for caution in basing deductions on comparisons between studies by different workers. Overlap between the topics covered is perhaps inevitable in a book of this kind. It enables the reader to discover differing views, most notably on the genetic basis for familial clustering of melanomas and dysplastic naevi, but detracts from the pleasure of reading straight through this short, well produced book. It is a useful source of information and the detailed reports on an enquiry into first symptoms of melanoma in Canada, and public education campaigns in Queensland and Glasgow, will be especially useful for those concerned with health education.

But are intervention programmes certain to prolong lives, to what extent and at what cost? As with any early detection programme a shift towards earlier diagnosis is not sufficient as evidence of true benefit, and survival measurements are confounded by lead time bias and the possibility that cases which would have regressed spontaneously may be included. In this