Short Reviews


This book is part of the series on Interdisciplinary Topics in Gerontology and reports the results of a survey of all centenarians living in Hungary in 1987. The first stage of the survey involved the compilation of the main demographic, ethnic, and general health information. Data are presented on socioeconomic background and living conditions, endogenous and environmental factors influencing longevity, measured in various characteristics, and survival. In the second stage a thorough medical examination was carried out on the participants. Comparisons are made with a similar 1960 survey and provide interesting insights into factors involved in the aging process.


This large tome contains the basic results from the Mini-Finland Health Survey. Out of a nationally representative sample of 8000 persons aged 30 years and over, 96% were interviewed at home and 90% participated in a health examination. The health interview indicated that almost 60% of the examinees were chronically ill and much of the book is concerned with describing the spectrum of disease. The degree of handicap, need for medical care, and unmet demand are covered in considerable detail. The book is written in Finnish but there is a very comprehensive English summary and it should be of interest to those involved in similar work in other countries.


This monograph provides a comprehensive overview of health and personal social services research supported by the Department of Health in 1989/90. Work in certain priority areas such as Aids and Child Care are described in more detail by those conducting the research. This is a useful publication for those involved in health services research in the United Kingdom.


The evaluation of environmental pollutants and their relevance to human health is the main topic of this book. The chapters comprise papers presented at a European meeting in Dusseldorf in 1989 and, disappointingly, no attempt has been made to standardise the print and presentation of the text. Nevertheless, the papers cover a wide range of subject matter including mutagenic and carcinogenic activity of environmental chemicals, biological indicators for screening environmental contaminants, assessment of exposure to occupational chemicals, epidemiological studies on the health effects of pollution, and policies for environmental control.


In 1987 standard tabulations of cancer incidence from 137 populations in 36 countries were published by IARC. This present monograph presents the data in graphic form, thus allowing an easier appreciation of the range and pattern of incidence internationally. Most of the data are for the years 1978-82 and highlight interesting international variations for different cancer sites.


People are rarely exposed to single chemicals. Pollution of air, soil, and water involves a multitude of chemicals comprising complex mixtures, the biological effects of which are only partially known. The evaluation of risks due to exposure to these complex mixtures is particularly difficult, as is the assessment of hazards produced by low level exposure to multiple known carcinogens. In this book, various aspects of risk assessment in relation to common complex exposures are dealt with by experts in the fields of epidemiology, biostatistics, chemical carcinogenesis, toxicology, genetics, and chemistry. It includes chapters on the general principles of exposure assessment, methods of screening and assessing various complex mixtures, and the effects of these contaminants on the environment and human health.

F R FOWKES
Edinburgh

Corrections

In the commentary by Davey Smith and Phillips in the last issue of the Journal (vol 44, No 4) an error was introduced during editing. In the first column on page 258, 12 lines from the bottom of the page, the sentence should read "... thus, paradoxically, the situation arises in which measurement of HDL-C better characterises a subject's usual triglyceride level than a one off measurement of triglyceride." We apologise for inadvertently altering the meaning of the sentence.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

After intensive study in known multiple sclerosis (MS) cluster areas, more than one researcher has come to the conclusion that MS was caused by a toxic or viral exogenous agent: (1) Orkney and Shetland Islands 1939 to 1970, and (2) Faroe islands 1943-1960, where in both instances it was decided that an unknown toxic or viral exogenous agent was the cause, but the identity of this mysterious agent has remained elusive. We therefore made three visits to the latest MS cluster area, Key West, in our own home state of Florida in 1986, 1987, and 1988. This cluster of 30 cases began in 1972 and ended abruptly in 1986 with no new cases since. By reviewing all of our observations of the changing and improving environmental conditions in the Key West area over this time span, when whatever had been causing the clustering had apparently ceased, we came to the following conclusions. (1) Canine distemper (CDV) and genetic-autoimmune hypotheses were eliminated because of the unusual pattern within the cluster. (2) Chickenpox, rather than measles, emerged as the most likely primary factor in a two stage disease. (3) The highest density of birds of various descriptions in the same area as the highest concentration of MS cases suggested that birds were quite likely the vectors of the unknown exogenous agent. The most likely avian pathogenic agent of MS was considered to be Marek's disease virus (MDV).

Howard S MacGregor
PO Box 2787
Kissimmee, FL 34742-2787, USA

NOTICES

The 22nd French National Meeting and the 1st European Meeting of Occupational Medicine will be held in Nantes, France, on June 2-5, 1991. The programme features "Occupational Medicine and the Environment", "Health, Ageing and Work", and "Occupational Dermatoses of Chemical Origin". Official language is French but there will be simultaneous English translation. Further details from the Secretary-General: Dr Catherine Butat, Société de Médecine du Travail et d’Ergonomie de l'Ouest, Faculté de Médecine-1, rue Gaston Veil, 44035 Nantes Cedex, France. Phone 010-33-40-41-26-28, ext 2308.