

A Short Course in Epidemiology. By Staffan E Norell. (Pp 181; price not stated.) New York: Raven Press, 1991. ISBN 0-88167-842-2.

This is an original book, different from other texts in epidemiology. It is a short course focused mainly on the validity of epidemiological investigations. The first chapter on cohort design is followed by chapters on systematic and random errors. The succeeding chapters address various designs of case-control studies. The book ends with a short discussion of choice of study design and interpretation of results.

The discussion on misclassification and its impact of the estimation of relative risk is excellent. There is a useful table giving estimated relative risks for different exposure frequencies, true relative risk levels, sensitivities, and specificities. There is another table on power calculation. Efficiency, ie, the precision in relation to the cost of a study, is well discussed throughout the text. The author classifies case-control studies into three groups. In "type A" case-control studies, information on exposure is collected prior to follow up. It is analysed when the follow up is completed, and only for the cases and a random sample of controls. In "type B" case-control studies, information on exposure is collected only after the cases have occurred. In "type C" case-control studies, controls selected at random from the population are not available but are, for example, replaced by hospital controls. The chapters on case-control studies are quite extensive. Unfortunately, in the following chapter, discussion of randomised control trials and other experiments is only given two pages. The chapter on interpretation of results is also very short. This book does not deal directly with the analysis of epidemiological data and is non-mathematical.

Strong points are that there are plenty of case studies, exercises with answers, and a list of 706 classical references on study design, validity, and efficiency in epidemiology. There is also a five page glossary.

Contrary to what is stated on the back cover, this is not a book on basic epidemiology. It is nonetheless an excellent intermediate short course in epidemiological design, well presented and easy to read.

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Cardiovascular Diseases: Genetics, Epidemiology, and Prevention. by James J Nora, Kåre Berg, and Audrey Hart Nora. (Pp 182; £35.) Oxford: OUP, 1991. ISBN 0-19-5060326.

As its title suggests, this book covers the genetics, epidemiology and prevention of cardiovascular defects and diseases, and gives a contemporary and readable account of these disorders. Firstly, the authors consider atherosclerosis, coronary artery disease, and hypertension, common disorders the aetiology of which is determined by the interaction of a number of genes with lifestyle

factors. Although the involvement of thrombotic and other factors in coronary artery disease is mentioned, this chapter is heavily biased towards the role of lipids and lipoproteins. This is, understandably, a reflection of the particular research interests of the authors, but makes this particular chapter less than comprehensive. The following chapters cover genetic and environmental factors which contribute to congenital heart disease, with a separate discussion of the various defects and specific environmental agents. The next section deals with relatively rare single gene disorders and a number of syndromes, some of unknown origin and others due to chromosomal anomalies, where cardiovascular defects or disease are prominent features. Finally, there is discussion of what the future might bring, with particular emphasis on prevention and on the merits of population screening. Running throughout this book is the concept that genes cannot be considered in isolation from their environment, whether in vitro or in vivo, in terms of their contribution to the aetiology of a disease, especially a common one. This also applies to the converse situation, as illustrated by genetic predisposition to environmental teratogens, although this is likely to occur less frequently. The factor which distinguishes this book from many contemporaneous publications is that the authors place current knowledge in a historical and ethical context, making this book of interest to scientist and clinician alike.

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Science Challenging AIDS. Eds G Giraldo, B Rossi, E Beth-Giraldo, L Chieco-Bianchi, F Dianzani, G Giraldo, and P Verani. (Pp 300; price not stated.) Basel: Karger, 1991. ISBN 3-8055-5485.

This book tries to conjure up the spirit and structure of the VIIth International Conference on AIDS which was held in Florence in June 1991. It combines Master and State of the Art plenary lectures, the four "best papers" (selected by the editors), and five summary reports in its 300 pages. It is a good precis of the conference but some of the chapters suffer from a rushed "dictaphone" style.

The combative introduction by the Italian Minister of Public Health is followed by a paper by President Museveni of Uganda. His African perspective on HIV transmission calls for a change in sexual behaviour back to previous cultural practices of fidelity and condemnation of premarital sex and he is emphatic that condoms cannot be the main way of stemming the pandemic.

The master lectures are personal views which highlight important areas in biomedical research, progress in therapy, and AIDS in developing countries. These are written in a personable style and not only manage to give a sense of urgency to the pandemic but also set the scene for the plenary papers.

The plenaries include James Chin's clear and concise review of two World Health Organization models, one for short term projections of AIDS and the other an estimate of projected AIDS mortality in children. Gallo's anecdotal chapter on "AIDS and related malignancies" contrasts with Haseltine's grandiosely titled but excellent "Molecular biology of the AIDS virus: ten years of discovery—hope for the future." It is thought provoking and, more importantly, aimed at a wide audience. The book stays on course with Ian Weller's chapter on zidovudine treatment and the pitfalls in using surrogate markers of therapeutic outcome. The current optimism over AIDS vaccines is tempered by Bolognesi and then, back in the developing world, Mhloyi stresses the need to be able to cope with HIV at all levels in society especially when medical and welfare services are being overwhelmed.

One of the "best papers" compared the risk reduction and stabilisation of HIV seroprevalence among New York City drug injectors to those in Bangkok. Another used a multivariate analysis to examine the change in AIDS risk behaviours from adolescence to adulthood. These studies were well planned and their findings are directly applicable to HIV prevention programmes.

Readers with no time to plough through volumes of abstract books but who want to review the conference quickly should peruse the last five summary report chapters. However if one is really short of time, I would recommend reading just the epidemiology and prevention commentary, in spite of there being little mention of disease progression studies.

There was very little new or challenging to be found in this book but it does contain some excellent reviews of current knowledge and many of the chapters are very well referenced. Because of the diversity of material I cannot see individuals buying it, but most units interested in AIDS might want to invest in a copy even though the next conference is almost upon us.

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Short Reviews

Patterns of Referral. By J Bradlow, A Coutler, and P Brooks. (Pp 41; £4.50.) Oxford: Health Services Research Unit, University of Oxford, 1992. ISBN 1-874551-00-6.

This report describes referral patterns from general practices to specialist outpatient clinics in the Oxford region. The results are based on information provided by 36 general practices on over 45 000 referrals made over a period of 10 months during 1990-1991.