

mental deficiency, which derives from the author's vast clinical experience, and there are descriptions and photographs of many other unusual syndromes.

The book is unlikely to find itself on the bedside table of the general physician or family doctor, but will be read by many with specialist interests in obesity. The price of £17.50 for a paperback may deter some individuals.

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The Surfactant System of the Lung. Prevention and Treatment of Neonatal and Adult Respiratory Distress Syndrome, edited by E.V. Cosmi, G.C. Di Renzo and M.M. Anceschi. Pp. 240, illustrated. Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1991. Hardback £45.00.

This volume contains the proceedings of an international symposium on Pulmonary Surfactant held in Italy towards the end of 1989. Unlike many similar books the editing is good and the contributions have been reset in a consistent style which has resulted in a clear presentation. The 33 very short chapters cover topics ranging from the basic gene structure of the surfactant proteins, through some of the factors which influence surfactant production during development to reports of surfactant replacement trials in preterm infants as well as its more novel use in cases of adult RDS. It has the advantages of a symposium, viz. a wide range of topics is covered, albeit briefly and one's attention span need not be taxed; useful brief reviews by world authorities sit next to scientific presentations and interesting clinical case reports. By its nature, alas, it also has the disadvantages of a scientific meeting: it is by no means comprehensive and the quality of the chapters in terms of interest and scientific content is variable, ranging from the excellent to the mundane. Its major problem, perhaps, is that much of the data and many of the ideas are now at least 2 years old and surfactant research has advanced in that time. Nevertheless, it is a slim volume which is easy to dip into and is

likely to contain something to interest anyone concerned with some aspect of pulmonary surfactant, however peripherally. It is not, however, a text from which to begin one's education on the subject.

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Vitamin C and Cancer – Medicine or Politics?, Evelleen Richards. Pp. xii + 264. Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1991. Hardback £35.00.

The story of a celebrated scientific figure, Linus Pauling, in alliance with a Scots surgeon taking on the American oncology establishment in their efforts to prove the efficacy of vitamin C in advanced cancer is a classic David versus Goliath saga. That they were unsuccessful in showing a benefit of vitamin C is now history; nevertheless the fact that serious clinical trials were carried out by the establishment was a remarkable achievement in itself. In this book Evelleen Richards presents an enjoyable account of events surrounding the vitamin C controversy and a challenging analysis of the randomized clinical trial as the ultimate means of obtaining information on treatment effectiveness. She concludes, using the example of the vitamin C trials, that such trials are malleable to social, political and media influences and that they are constrained by the 'rules' of the medical establishment, especially in the USA, so that they can never really give the absolute means of providing reliable knowledge of treatment effectiveness. The book is certainly valuable supplementary reading to all interested in the assessment and improvement of medical treatments. Unfortunately, at £35.00 in hardback, one has to express some doubt as to how widely it will be read, especially by a medical establishment already oversaturated with specialist books and journals.

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Books Received

ABC of Antenatal Care, G. Chamberlain. Pp. viii + 84, illustrated. BMJ, London, 1992. Paperback, UK £9.95, overseas, £12.00.

Annual Review of Microbiology, Volume 45, 1991, edited by L. Nicholas Ornston. Pp xi + 657, not illustrated. Annual Reviews Inc., Palo Alto, California, 1991. Hardback, USA and Canada \$41, elsewhere \$46, including P&P.

A World Guide to Infections – Diseases, Distribution, Diagnosis, Mary E. Wilson. Pp. 769, not illustrated. Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 1991. Hardback, £80.00.

A-Z of Family Health, Paul Giangrande. Pp. 319, illustrated. Hamlyn, London, 1991. Hardback, £14.99.

Brain Blood Flow in Neurology and Psychiatry, P.J. Ell and D.C. Costa. Pp 183, 166 illustrations. Churchill Livingstone, London, 1991. Hardback, £14.95.

Critical Care Algorithms, R.F. Armstrong, C. Bullen, S.L. Cohen, M. Singer and A.R. Webb. Pp. xi + 100, illustrated. Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, Tokyo, 1991. Paperback, £15.00.