

Book review

S. Corkin, K. L. Davis, J. H. Growdon, E. Usdin, R. J. Wurtman (eds.): *Alzheimer's disease: A report of progress in research*. Vol. 19. Raven Press, New York 1982. \$ 83.

This volume in the "Aging Series" is a compilation of presentations made at a meeting of the International Study Group on the Pharmacology of Memory Disorders Associated with Aging in 1981, Zurich, Switzerland.

Some discoveries during the last two decades, mainly on postmortem brain material, have aroused an intense interest in dementia of Alzheimer type. One reason for this interest is that biochemical research has produced clues to treatment hypotheses.

The discoveries made, concern neurotransmitter abnormalities in brains with Alzheimer's disease or senile dementia of Alzheimer type. The main topic of the volume is a presentation of the neurotransmitter abnormalities but a considerable part also deals with clinical drug trials in patients with dementia of Alzheimer type.

The importance of disturbances in different neurotransmitter systems has been discussed. Great Britain and the United States of America give special importance to disturbances in the cholinergic system for the etiology of dementia of Alzheimer type, while giving less importance to other changes in neurotransmitter systems. In this volume the problem is again considered from the cholinergic viewpoint. Many of the chapters deal with the reduced cholinergic function in the brains

of patients with the dementia syndrome, the behavioural consequences of this reduction and the effect of a therapy in which the failing cholinergic functions are activated by drugs. However, other types of biochemical disturbances are also discussed and the reader obtains a good overview of the biochemical findings in dementia of Alzheimer type.

In one section of the book, memory function in aging and in dementia disorders are carefully discussed, and the cause of age-associated cognitive decline and memory failures in dementia is elucidated.

One third of the book is devoted to clinical drug trials, with one whole section on treatment with precursors to acetylcholine, acetylcholine agonists or drugs which affect the acetylcholine metabolism on the synaptic or postsynaptic level. In some investigations this treatment is found to be of benefit but, although of great theoretical interest, the benefit is so marginal as to be of no clinical use. The same marginal effect is achieved in clinical trials with non-cholinergic agents.

The volume includes at least 60 presentations, which makes it rather difficult to read, but certainly provides all the information worth knowing about the biochemical aspects of Alzheimer's disease, and all those with a special interest in dementia of this type are recommended to buy the book. The level is probably too advanced for students and nurses, but the clinical information would be of value to hospitals treating dementia, and the book should find a place in all good medical libraries.

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