BOOKS RECEIVED

Radioimmunoassay of antibody and its clinical applications

By D. PARRATT, H. MCKENZIE, K. H. NIELSEN and S. J. COBB. 1982. John Wiley and Sons Ltd, Chichester. Pp. xvii and 156. £15.00.

The authors have sought in this book to collate relevant information, mainly from personal experience, on the use of radioimmunoassay (RIA) methods for measuring antibodies. The contents comprise nine chapters covering the general principles of RIA, the preparation of reagents, types of antibody assays and practical applications. Each chapter is given a few introductory paragraphs and is then divided into sections and subsections, all of which are listed on the contents pages. Finally, there is a useful appendix with lists of commercial sources of reagents and equipment, and some general notes on working with radioisotopes. The index is brief and the reader is likely to find the contents list more helpful.

A stated objective of the authors is to provide the reader with the necessary information required to operate and adapt RIA successfully. Considering this objective, practical guidance should be given on how to set up and standardise an RIA. However, the novice is too often left only with the advice that the "method" has to be chosen according to individual requirements. Better guidance would be particularly useful in chapters 2 and 3 which otherwise describe comprehensively various methods available for the preparation of antigens (mainly bacterial) and antisera for RIA.

The descriptions of different types of radioimmunoassay are well written and informative. Chapter 4 gives a lucid account of the principles of Farr's precipitation assay while chapter 5 considers important practical aspects of direct antibody assays.

The last four chapters of the book describe different applications of RIA of antibody and appear somewhat unbalanced. Thus, the measurement of total and specific IgE is given a whole chapter (6) while other clinical applications are described in the next chapter of similar length. Detailed descriptions are given of allergic alveolitis and candidiasis, with shorter notes on brucellosis and assays of immune complexes. Because the clinical applications of RIA for antibody have so far been very few, how sad that one of the success stories in clinical diagnosis is not described, namely its important role in the diagnosis of viral hepatitis A and B. "Further applications" for RIA of antibody in man and in veterinary medicine are reviewed in the final two chapters, often in list form. I found these latter parts of the book patchy. Many sections are of doubtful value because they are really outside the scope of the book or because the information given is either outdated or too brief. There are also too many short paragraphs providing additional information, with numerous back references, to earlier chapters.

The book is a genuine attempt to bridge the gap between the theory and practice of RIA. It is very readable and the information should be easily digestible at all levels, although some readers may object to the mixture of general information given simplistically and specific information given in detail, which inevitably has led to a certain unevenness. Most workers interested in assaying antibody should find some useful information in this book but its bias towards allergic reactions will restrict the readership who will find it a useful reference book. The price will probably deter most prospective readers with only a marginal interest in the subject, unless they can obtain a copy from their library.

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Mycobacterial diseases

By J. M. GRANGE. 1982. Current topics in infectious diseases, no. 1. Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd, London. Pp. xi and 115. £9.75.

This review brings together in a very convenient form the main developments that have