that by contrast to the rapid lysing of neurones that takes place in adults with head injury or stroke, many of the neurones took from 6 to 24 hours to shrink and die in this model. The team found that caspase enzymes were activated just before this slow death as if the cells were undergoing normal apoptotic death. This hinted to Holtzman that a caspase inhibitor may be successful in saving anoxic brain tissue in neonates even if administered several hours after the potentially damaging event. A major question in the field is whether it would be clinically useful to use caspase inhibitors to prevent apoptosis.

### Control of tissue loss

He and his team decided to test the idea using BAF, a modified amino acid previously shown to inhibit common apoptosis. The researchers injected BAF into the brains of some rats immediately before the oxygen supply was reduced and into others 3 h later. After one week, the researchers examined brain slices. They found that in the rats that received no BAF treatment there was extensive tissue damage in the affected hemisphere. The cortex, hippocampus and striatum had shrunk, and the fluid-filled ventricles had expanded. But a very different picture emerged when they analysed the BAF-treated rats. 'On average, the control animals lost about 50% of the tissue in these regions, whereas the BAF-treated animals lost only about 20%,' Holtzman explains. 'The difference between the BAF-treated animals and the control animals was so great that it's hard to imagine that treatment with BAF or similar compounds wouldn't be worth exploring as potential treatments in humans. That issue obviously needs to be investigated further, however,' he adds.

*David Bradley*
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# Book reviews

**'Emerging Drugs: the Prospects for Improved Medicines'**

edited by W.C. Bowman, J.D. Fitzgerald and J.B. Taylor, Ashley Publications, 1998. £395, $690 (vi + 397 pages) ISSN 1361-9195

This is the third annual volume in this successful series from pharmaceutical research specialists Ashley Publications (http://www.ashley-pub.com). This edition has further refined the approach to providing succinct topical information in key therapeutic areas in the context of the industrial setting. Each chapter (there are 24) is structured in eight sections to convey a comprehensive picture. The sections within each chapter are:

- Concise background to the subject matter
- Assessment of medical need for alternative or novel therapies
- Assessment of the market and anticipated changes over time
- Summary of current research goals
- Outline of the scientific rationale for the approach(es) considered
- Analysis of the competitive environment
- Discussion of potential development issues
- Overall editorial analysis

The editors have done an excellent job in selecting a team of authors, primarily from the industrial sector. Subjects covered are too numerous to mention here, but representative topics include insulin-sensitizing agents, benign prostatic hyperplasia, tyrosine kinase inhibitors as anticancer agents, inhibition of apoptosis, phospholipase $A_2$ inhibitors, antisense oligonucleotides and therapeutic vaccines. This volume, like its predecessors, is likely to find its way onto the shelves of many company libraries.

**'Global Drug Discovery: Exploiting Technologies to Accelerate Drug Development'**

L.M. Savage (Managing Editor), IBC Library Series, 1998. $1500, commercial; $895, academic (over 600 pages) ISBN 1-57936-086-6

One of the most professional organizers of conferences specializing in topics relevant to drug discovery, IBC, is now making the proceedings of selected events available on a commercial basis. *Global Drug Discovery* is based on presentations from three major IBC conferences held in 1997 (two US, one UK). The two volume book covers the whole spectrum of activities in drug discovery. By definition, the content is not comprehensive, but authors' original manuscripts or, alternatively, transcripts of the talk are included in a range of discovery areas: new technologies for lead discovery and optimization; generating, identifying, and validating new targets; bioinformatics; laboratory automation, miniaturization technologies, and robotics; strategic management of drug discovery and poster presentations. There are twenty two chapters in all and most contributors are from the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries.

The price and focus of this work mean that it will be relatively unattractive to academic centres. However, companies may feel that this represents a worthwhile investment, as it is a permanent record and avoids the cost and inconvenience of sending a staff member to the meeting. What can never be captured on paper, however, is the networking value of 'being there'. Nevertheless, for those whose T&E budget is a little stretched this year, this may represent a significant short-cut.

*David Hughes*