

future therapeutic applications of monoclonal antibodies. We look forward to hearing of these at the 9th International Hammersmith meeting, which is to be held at the same place in May 1992.

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Book Reviews

New Developments in Fundamental and Applied Radiobiology

Edited by Colin B. Seymour and Carmel Mothersill. London, UK, Taylor and Francis, 1991. 460 pp., £40.00. ISBN 0 7484 0020 6.

THIS BOOK is the proceedings of 23rd Annual Meeting of The European Society for Radiation Biology, held in Dublin on 23-26 September 1990. The book is edited by Seymour and Mothersill, two of the sponsor country organisers. To the organisers' and publisher's credit, the book has appeared within less than a year of the conference itself, and so the information should not be too outdated. I confess to not having attended the meeting, which I can only hope will serve to make this review more objective.

The subjects of the papers cover an enormous range, from basic molecular biology, to therapy, to irradiation of food, to environmental issues. To produce some sort of order in this potential chaos, the 58 contributions have been split hierarchically into sections, chapters and the papers themselves. The two sections are Fundamental Radiobiology and Applied Radiobiology. Chapters in the first section include dose rate effects, dosimetry, DNA damage and repair, mutagenesis, transformation and non-ionising radiation, while those in the second include imaging, developments in radiotherapy, the oxygen effect, the environment and food irradiation. Each chapter contains between three and nine papers.

On the positive side first, the book contains some clear and interesting papers which were often, but not exclusively, the first in each section. These were presumably the plenary lectures, although I could not find this explicitly stated anywhere. Some

(random) examples were the review-type papers by Goodhead on biophysical aspects of low doses and low dose rates, by Bryant on the relationship between DNA breaks and chromosome aberrations, and by Little on the molecular mechanisms of radiation induced mutagenesis. These and some others would be useful for students entering the field, for teachers of radiation biology and as timely reminders/summaries for those of us involved in radiobiology or therapy but just outside the fields being discussed. Although the vast majority of ideas presented in this book are not new, the occasional author dared to speculate wildly, providing stimulation and food for thought. The paper by Wakelin on creating targets for DNA damage, while presenting no data, was such an example.

Unfortunately, to this reviewer, there were more negative than positive aspects of the book. It contains all the usual disadvantages of a Proceedings, i.e. highly variable quality not only of the science, but of the presentation, including different print quality, letter types, diagram styles, reference styles, etc. The papers were presumably not peer reviewed, which would have contributed to the variability in scientific quality. Occasional papers also contained high frequencies of typographical errors, heightening the sense of the lack of quality control. This is obviously simply the binding together of a series of submitted papers, understandable for keeping costs down, but for a book costing £40 the format is irritating and a possible disincentive for purchase. In addition, some papers did not contain abstracts or summaries, one of the more important parts of a scientific paper. (One abstract appeared after the reference list—a confusing choice of position designed for it to be overlooked!).

Concerning the scientific quality, I rated approximately one quarter of the papers as "good", judged on a simple and subjective scale of clarity of presentation of arguments, data and conclusions. If I knew something about the subject, the rating was also affected by whether the paper presented new ideas or findings, although this was necessarily given less weight, since the majority of papers were outside my direct field, as, presumably, for the average reader. This fraction could be equated to "worthwhile" papers, and is probably not atypical for such a conference. The question arises as to whether this fraction of "good" papers makes the book worth buying, considering that only a fraction of these will be in the subject of interest to a particular reader. Most of the data will be, or has been, published in scientific journals. Furthermore, coverage per subject is often incomplete resulting from the necessarily limited number of contributions. A newcomer will therefore receive a biased or incomplete view. This is more of a risk with this type of book than in those devoted to one subject only.

My overall feeling about this book was lukewarm at best. The specialist would be better off reading regular papers and reviews in his/her subject in peer-reviewed journals or more topic-oriented books. These proceedings may be of some use for new research workers in radiobiology if guided to the better papers by an experienced radiobiologist, but I would not recommend it as a must for every radiobiology or radiotherapy department.

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