Book Reviews

Reptile Venoms and Toxins (Handbook of Natural Toxins). Edited by A. T. Tu. Marcel Dekker, New York, 1991, Vol. 5, xxi + 827 pp., ISBN 0-8247-8376-X, $185.00 (U.S. and Canada), $212.75 (all other countries).

Reptile Venoms and Toxins is the fifth and most recent volume in Marcel Dekker's series devoted to the chemistry, biology, and clinical relevance of biological toxins. Among the contributors to this volume, Dr. Tu has assembled a number of internationally recognized experts. The various reviews embrace a broad range of topics related to snake venoms and ophidism. In addition, one manuscript is devoted to the chemistry of Gila monster venoms. Oddly, even though frogs and toads do not qualify as reptiles, the book concludes with a paper (albeit an excellent one) concerning venom secretion in anuran cutaneous glands. Tu's earlier paper on sea snake venoms, which appeared in Volume 3, might more appropriately have been included in the present volume. Most of the papers in *Reptile Venoms and Toxins* are current, thorough, and exceptionally well written. Several authors employ extensive tables to summarize attributes of the myriad venom constituents impacting particular biological systems. These will be of considerable utility to many readers.

The volume is not without its flaws, however. Contributing authors are alphabetized in a List of Contributors at the front of the book; however, there is no Author Citation Index, such as was included in Volumes 1 and 2. This is unfortunate. The volume also lacks a separate taxonomic index, which would have been extremely useful. The general subject index totals only 25 pages and is quite superficial.

Editing, proofreading, and typesetting of the volume appear to have been unusually careless. For example, the format for cited references is inconsistent. Complete references are generally employed, which is helpful to the reader; however, in one paper, no ending page numbers are included, and in another, occasional references lack titles. Taxonomic errors are not uncommon in *Reptile Venoms and Toxins,* and the volume also contains an unacceptably high number of spelling and typographical errors.

By way of more serious criticism, three papers in *Reptile Venoms and Toxins* fall markedly short of the professional standard set by the remainder of the contributions. They are poorly organized, contain figures that contribute little or no useful information, and/or contain large quantities of ungrammatical text.

The aforementioned deficiencies are irritating not only because of the volume's cost, but because they are readily avoidable. Virtually all word processors include at least a spelling checker, if not a thesaurus as well. Most of these can be customized to recognize taxonomic names and technical terms. Grammatical errors and even awkward sentence structure can be flagged using a good grammar checker. Index generation can also be handled by computer.

Reptile Venoms and Toxins is destined to become a standard reference in toxinology for years to come, despite its shortcomings; however, both the editor and the publisher would serve the scientific community better if greater care were taken in editing future volumes.

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Pharmacy and the US Healthcare System. Edited by Jack E. Fincham and Albert I. Wertheimer. Pharmaceutical Products Press (Haworth Press, Inc.), Binghamton, New York, 1992, xix + 569 pp., ISBN 1-56024-097-90, $24.95 (paperback).

This is a timely, comprehensive collection prepared by two accomplished academics, with contributions from other familiar names in social and administrative pharmacy. The book is from a series of six titles assembled for the Pharmaceutical Products Press. At a time when changes in the health-care environment are increasingly critical to the work of pharmaceutical scientists and practitioners alike, its contents reveal much information and analysis that, unfortunately, has not been well noted within our respective disciplines.

Today the U.S. health-care system is confronted with astronomical, climbing costs, provoking increased scrutiny and "interference" by the payers of care, government, and corporate business, besides the consumers, who now contribute more than 32% of the average $4,296 cost per family in 1991. Total expenditures are projected to reach $817 billion in 1992, rising to 14% of the GNP. Drugs constitute one of the most rapidly rising components. In response to such inflation, the growing influence of national, state, and local health policies in shaping health-care institutions is quite evident. With our aging population, changing consumer attitudes are forcing new social and cultural sensitivities on the part of practitioners. Altered financing arrangements, from managed care to Medicare's new Resource-Based Relative Value Scale for physician reimbursement, are directing new patterns of practice and reshaping the roles and relationships of physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and other health professionals. It is clear that the complexity and diversity of the social context in which we all work demand more forthright attention. Here this book can be helpful.

The volume under review is a worthwhile primer at this time when national health program debates have intensified. It is a well-qualified text for pharmacy students, as well as for graduate students in the related sciences. Since its main competitors in the fields of health policy and health administration often say little about pharmacy, the pharmaceutical sciences, or pharmaceutical care, the book fills a gap where this particular application is so needed. Most of the chapters can stand alone, so the reader will find overlap in some data and discussion of issues. One notable absence is the lack of timely emphasis on recent public policies affecting pharmacy: the (repealed) Medicare catastrophic care amend-

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ments, the Medicaid Prudent Pharmaceutical Purchasing Provisions (the Pryor legislation in 1990), and new Food and Drug Administration directions. The chapters on managed health care, the health professions, consumers, and the provision of pharmaceutical services to subpopulations are all particularly well done.

The lengthy selection on "The New Biomedical Technology: Implications for Pharmacy" and the chapter on the pharmaceutical industry will be most useful to pharmaceutical researchers. Robotics and the host of new diagnostic and pharmaceutical products destined for the marketplace call for scientists to gain keen insights into the regulatory workings of the FDA, Office of Technology Assessment, and now over 30 private organizations influencing health policy related to the use of new and existing medical technologies. No matter how groundbreaking in the minds of its scientific researchers, new discoveries are unlikely to follow the past path of immediate dispersion throughout the health-care delivery system. Already "budget buster" pharmaceutical agents are being restricted, by either third-party payors or corporate managers in hospitals, health maintenance organizations, and other providers. Stricter study on cost effectiveness of the new products beyond alternative therapeutic choices is being demanded; provider acceptance of introductions is increasingly delayed until they resolve their fiscal unsteadiness due to the current reimbursement climate.

In sum, this volume makes a needed contribution in highlighting relevant issues in the larger health-care system to pharmaceutical scientists. It warrants a focused review.

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