(IPCEMC) is a non-governmental group of approximately 20 international scientists who organise themselves and others to discuss and prepare papers on specific topics in the area of environmental mutagenesis and carcinogenesis. The deliberations of these scientists are published in the journal *Mutation Research* and collections of the papers are now available as booklets representing the output of individual committees. 'Perspectives in Mutation Epidemiology' is a collection of position papers and a review and recommendations paper prepared by committee 5 of IPCEMC which discuss the topic of monitoring the human population for the possible induction of mutation by environmental agents.

The growth of short term testing of chemicals for their possible mutagenic activity over the past decade, stimulated by the reported correlation between mutagenic and carcinogenic potential, has led to the identification of a significant number of mutagenic environmental chemicals. The occurrence of such mutagens in the human environment raises the question as to whether these chemicals are producing mutations in human somatic and germ cells, which may lead to the production of increasing levels of congenital defects which originate from mutant gene products. If such mutations are being produced then the task of the epidemiologist is to identify the causal agents concerned. Probably the most confounding factor in such studies is the difficulty of distinguishing between new and pre-existing mutations. Changes in mutant frequency in human populations may be influenced by a variety of factors such as changes in selection pressure due to improved medical care, which may alter the reproductive contribution of pre-existing mutations and thus complicate the identification of specific human mutagenic hazards.

The individual papers contained within the booklet provide an impressive synthesis of information on the role of mutations in human disease. Comprehensive and authoritative tables are provided which outline clinical conditions with a mutational origin and calculations of their frequencies in populations. I would particularly commend to the clinical reader the two papers by Ernest Hook who covers the design of epidemiological studies and the role of chromosome abnormalities in human disease. It is to be hoped that the former paper will be essential reading for any person responsible for the design

and funding of future epidemiological studies, particularly those that originate from public pressure stemming from the identification of a specific environmental hazard.

Unfortunately the review chapter which introduces the collection does not live up to the standard of the rest of the papers, but perhaps this stems from the style of the publication. The simple expedient of placing conclusions and recommendations at the end of the booklet would enable the reader to benefit from the wealth of information contained in the position papers before reading the committee's view. The recommendations made include views on future research directions and a quotation of scientific drudgery whose significance still eludes this reader.

JAMES M PARRY

Alkaptonuria

By S Sršeň. (Pp 324; 124 figures + 18 tables. Kčs 34.) Martin, Czechoslovakia: Osveta. 1984.

Alkaptonuria, though recognised as an inborn error of metabolism by Garrod, is not a disorder commonly encountered by medical geneticists or by other clinicians. It is likely that many cases are missed and such data as exist from newborn screening suggest that the incidence is much more common than would be thought from adult surveys.

Few research workers seem to have taken a major interest in this disorder in recent years, and among them Dr Sršeň has made a particular contribution, working in an area of Czechoslovakia which appears to have a particularly high incidence.

This book gathers together a lot of scattered information on the condition, summarising the author's own work over many years, as well as providing a valuable source of relevant publications. The main text is not in English but this is not such a disadvantage as might be thought since there is an English summary and English legends to figures, together with extensive pedigrees and illustrations.

Altogether this is a valuable book dealing with not only the genetics but the pathology, biochemistry, and clinical features of an interesting and rather neglected disorder. It deserves to be readily available as the definitive work on alkaptonuria.

PETER S HARPER