

Symposium on glial interfaces in the nervous system: development and repair

This Anatomical Society symposium, held at University College, Cork in September 1995 was the first of its kind. The objective was to stimulate and facilitate constructive interaction between experts on topics relating to the various types of glial barrier which form partitions within the nervous system. Some of these barriers are transient and are found only during development, for example, those which define the limits of developing nuclei or fibre bundles. Others are permanent, such as those at the transitional zones which separate the CNS and PNS milieux at nerve root attachments to the neuraxis. Still others, such as glial scars, are seen only following injury when they tend to inhibit neurite regeneration. In experimental circumstances, for example following irradiation or chemical damage, glial barriers may be broken down and even relocated. This may be associated with Schwann cell invasion of the CNS and, experimentally, with Schwann cell and glial cell transplantation into demyelinated areas. Such transplantation studies are in turn related to remyelination and CNS axon regeneration and the factors which facilitate these. Twelve review lectures were given on these topics. Five articles based on these communications are reproduced here. The underlying theme was the relationship between advances in the understanding of fundamental nervous tissue biology, especially as related to glial cells, and potential developments aimed at treating CNS demyelinating diseases and achieving CNS regeneration.

The coherence between the review topics and the close involvement of all the 60 or so delegates in cognate research areas resulted in lively, critical and constructive discussions, with particularly wide audience participation. The symposium also included two poster sessions.

The principal sources of funding were The Anatomical Society of Great Britain and Ireland, EU Directorate General XII and University College Cork's 150th Anniversary Fund.

JOHN FRAHER