Book reviews

Neonatal Skin, Structure and Function. Dermatology Series, Vol. 1. Edited by H Maibach and E Boitsits. Pp 296: SFr 118 hardback. New York and Basel: Marcel Dekker, 1982.

In the past, dermatologists have tended to present students with descriptive classifications and latin prescriptions for ointments and creams with very little patho-physiological basis. It is therefore a pleasure to read a book which tackles the basic physiology and anatomy of newborn skin, before discussing related clinical problems. We start with a histological comparison of infant and adult skin, followed by the development of sweat glands and sebaceous glands. Moving from structure to function, transepidermal water loss is reviewed with a critical description of the different methods for its measurement. There then follow no fewer than four short papers by different authors on diffusion of oxygen and carbon dioxide across neonatal skin. This impressed me with its authoritative and multi-disciplinary approach. I suspect that many adult dermatologists would not consider gas diffusion as an important property of skin. To the neonatologist, it can be vital.

For me, the most interesting sections of this book are the three papers on nappy rash (diaper dermatitis). This is a worthy subject for research but I cannot recall a recent paper at the Neonatal Society or the British Paediatric Association on it. There is a wealth of hard data here, incriminating occlusion and dismissing ammonia as a primary cause. The high frequency of *Candida* infection is reviewed and the design of cloth and disposable nappies (diapers) discussed. Several of the authors work for commercial companies and there is one quote worthy of a marketing manager: '10-20 years from now, washable cloth diapers are as likely to be forgotten as the washable sanitary pads of 50 years ago.'

The final section is on skin diseases in the neonate. The text is purely descriptive with virtually no details of treatment and the illustrations are unfortunately black and white. It is a pity that a commercial company did not subsidise colour printing. Despite this criticism, I warmly rec-

ommend this book for neonatal or midwifery departmental libraries.

ANDY WHITELAW

Paediatric Problems in General Practice. By M Modell and R Boyd. Pp 226: £9.95 paperback. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.

It has been a delight to read this book. The authors have addressed themselves to the real problems of child doctoring in general practice and have done so with wit and wisdom. Michael Modell is in general practice and Robert Boyd is a consultant paediatrician. Their book is easy to read and has a flow of style that is a happy relief after anthologies. Dr Modell and Professor Boyd write as experienced clinicians and put in perspective events that take place in the home and in the surgery. They are obviously also experienced fathers. They have recommended approaches which are practical in the context of a general practitioner's day. This sometimes entails doing more, or occasionally intervening less, than is thought 'correct' at the moment.

Although the book is meant especially for those who have just entered practice, it can equally have a place on the bookshelves of any doctor involved in clinical paediatrics. The subjects range from catastrophies, or potential catastrophies in infancy to psychosocial problems such as poor sleeping or the loss of a parent through divorce. There are chapters with practical advice on fits and faints and one on orthopaedic variations that are within the range of normal.

The authors' compassion as well as their erudition is seen throughout this book. The chapter on the 'snowed-under' mum is a prime example. There are no illustrations, but a number of tables break up the text. This is the only book where I have read the title of every reference at the end of each chapter for no other reason than the authors' pithy comments about many of them! This book is full of wise comment, sound advice, and practical information. I highly recommend it and congratulate the authors on their work.

ALASTAIR BINNIE

Care of the Neurologically Handicapped Child. A Book for Parents and Professionals. By A L Prenskey and H S Palkes. Pp 331: £18.50 hardback. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Although primarily directed towards parents of neurologically handicapped children, this book will be of more value to the increasing number of professional members of the multidisciplinary team who are faced with the task of answering parents' questions. The need to understand what is happening to their child is a major source of the emotional tensions experienced by parents. Their questions, both spoken and unspoken, regarding what the condition is, why it occurred, how it can be treated and what the future holds, must be answered before time and effort are expended on analysing parents' attitudes and feelings. As Mackeith stated, 'until their anxieties are (to some extent) dealt with by full assessment and explanation, their child is not a person but a question mark. . . . They present us with additional reasons for explaining more medicine to the public.'

Many books for parents tend to undervalue their ability to assimilate complex information about neurological handicaps and are too superficial or too restricted in the range of handicap which they cover. The present volume sets out to correct this. Following introductory chapters about normal and abnormal development and the discovery of handicap, the role of the various medical and paramedical specialists in assessment and treatment is considered. As might be expected from the United States, greater specialism in paediatrics and neurology is expected of the family physician, but a useful goal is set for what might be desirable in other countries. Chapters on major handicaps such as epilepsy, cerebral palsy, mental retardation, and neuromuscular disease provide a broad overview of the more common problems. It is regrettable that the only psychiatric topic covered in detail is hyperactivity and it is hoped that future editions will contain a more balanced view of the role of child psychiatry.

As might be expected in such an ambitious book, shortcomings are high-