Book reviews

Paediatric Problems in General Practice. By M Modell and R Boyd. 2nd ed. Pp 318: £15 hardback. Oxford Medical Publications, 1988. 0-19-261736-2.

The British Paediatric Association should issue this book with a health warning aimed at consultant paediatricians 'This book could seriously deprive you of work—not the work that you should be doing but the work of unnecessary referrals to paediatric outpatients by general practitioners'.

A general practitioner who has read this book, and indeed a paediatric senior house officer or registrar, would have found a treasure trove of the sort of good solid basic paediatrics that I know I need to practice effectively as a general practitioner. Not having read the first edition I was thrilled to find a paediatric book apparently purged of eponymous conditions and the dreaded glycogen storage diseases. Here was a paediatric text book, although it can hardly be called that, that actually stimulated me and kept me awake rather than put me to sleep.

This is really a book for the majority of doctors in the country who treat children—that is, general practitioners. This is not to be patronising. The book is no less well written and well researched and up to date for that, in fact more so. I think the best description would be that it is a finely tuned book. It is well structured, well bibliographed, and clearly and attractively set out. I particularly enjoyed the widely interspersed illustrative case histories, which in my experience are frequently the hallmark of a good medical read. The layout is problem orientated rather than system orientated and to this extent it matches the children who consult us.

Among the problems that this book addresses are those of ethnic minorities and the authors are not afraid to discuss the doctor's attitudes as well as his medical knowledge.

Naturally the book covers the controversial area of sexual abuse and non-accidental injury, although I found that to some extent there was a weakness in the sexual abuse advice in as much as that there was an admirable amount of explanation of how to diagnose sexual abuse but very little guidance on how to deal with disclosure and very little indication of the sort of work

that had to be done with the family in the period after diagnosis.

On a more general approach to child psychiatric problems, however, there is an excellent account of how to proceed with a child psychiatric referral and good advice on dealing with divorce and bereavement.

The section on prevention was comprehensive but there seemed to be very little real feel for the use of computers in general practice paediatrics. Perhaps this could be a task for the third edition.

Time after time while reading this book I have tested it against my needs as a clinician meeting problems that my children patients present to me daily—growth, painful joints, recurrent abdominal pain, headache, urinary tract infection and, of course, asthma—plus many others that I am sure any other general practitioner can mention. Every time the book scored full marks for common sense, practical suggestions, and up to date management.

In a review all I can do is recommend a book and in this case to general practitioners and training grade paediatricians—I wish I could do more—I wish I could send a copy to everyone of them.

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The Very Immature Infant: Less than 28 weeks' gestation. Edited by A Whitelaw and RWI Cooke. Pp 1157: £28.25 hardback. Churchill Livingstone, 1988. ISBN 0 443 04040 0.

All paediatricians who look after preterm infants will find items of interest in *The Very Immature Infant* in which the editors, Andrew Whitelaw and Richard Cooke have compiled a series of short review articles on topics relating to infants less than 28 weeks' gestation. Whereas many such reviews are published in North America, all the authors in this book are British and they provide a different perspective on many issues and also useful epidemiological and other data relating to this country.

The different authors cover specific areas

in which they have contributed to our understanding. These include a useful review on the physiology of the mid trimester fetus by Rodeck and Nicolini; new non-invasive methods of assessing brain oxygenation and haemodynamics is described by Reynolds *et al*; there is a chapter on the neurophysiological assessment of immature central nervous system by Eyre and a particularly helpful chapter on the immature visual system by Fielder *et al*. Many of the articles described the considerable advances in our knowledge and understanding of these very immature infants but our ignorance about other areas is also readily apparent. As the book covers only a number of selected topics several important areas, such as infection and periventricular haemorrhage, have been omitted.

The editors have concentrated on the biology of these very immature infants. There is only an extremely brief chapter examining clinical management (by McIntosh) and a single chapter on both outcome and costs (by Cooke). The brevity of these articles precludes consideration of difficult but crucial ethical questions surrounding the care of the immature infant such as how to decide on whether or not an infant is too immature to warrant active resuscitation and how best the increasing demand for care of such tiny infants can be met. With the impending reorganisation of the National Health Service it is likely that these are issues which paediatricians will shortly need to address and it is unfortunate that more space was not devoted to them.

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Fetal Neurology. Edited by A Hill and J Volpe. Pp 317: \$86.50 hardback. Raven Press, 1989. ISBN 0-88167-469-9.

Subspecialisation evolves: first there was fetomaternal medicine, then fetal medicine, and now fetal neurology. Advances in ultrasound have allowed study of the neurodevelopment of the fetus and form the basis for all the subjects covered in this