Book reviews

Birth Counts. Statistics of Pregnancy and Childbirth. By A Macfarlane and M Mugford. Pp 345; £9.95 paperback. London: HMSO, 1984. Accompanying book of tables: **Birth Counts. Statistics of Pregnancy and Childbirth, Tables.** By A Macfarlane and M Mugford. Pp 310; £19.95 paperback. London: HMSO, 1984.

Epidemiologists, sociologists, economists, health service administrators, the media, as well as the medical and nursing professions are, for different reasons, increasingly involving themselves in the statistics of reproduction and birth. Only the brave would contemplate writing a book on the subject—the risk of generating a large literary yawn is formidable. Nonetheless, Alison Macfarlane, a statistician, and Miranda Mugford, an economist, both from the National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit in Oxford, rise to the challenge and the result is a remarkable book that is anything but dull. *Birth Counts* brings together statistical information about pregnancy and childbirth in the United Kingdom, drawing on information made available by the Government Statistical Service and the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

There are two volumes—the first comprises the main text, illustrated by some well chosen figures and tables. The scope of the book is most impressive. The reader is introduced lucidly to definitions and classifications of perinatal statistics. The need to present data in a comparable way is apparent and is highlighted by a chapter devoted to international comparisons. One of the purposes of the book is to avoid the duplication of effort which is inherent in a widespread interest in data collection. Our attention is drawn to the numerous sources of statistical information which is now routinely collected in the National Health Service. This information is expanded in a very helpful appendix, which also draws attention to some key official publications on health statistics.

The authors write in a very stimulating style, using short historical reviews and liberally quoting from diverse sources of literature to illustrate a point or to sustain the reader's interest. Individual chapters deal with birth and death statistics and

factors responsible for their variation; fertility and early fetal loss; parents and their social circumstances; the characteristics of babies including illnesses and later disabilities; maternal mortality and morbidity; and the care of mothers and babies including a most revealing account of the costs of having a baby.

The companion volume comprises numerous statistical tables, arranged so that they can be referred to alongside the appropriate chapter in the main volume. The tables generally include data for 10 years up to 1980. There is a plethora of information here ranging from the commonplace to, for example, the total weight of contraceptive sheaths (including packing) imported into the UK each year from 1975–82. For those who find themselves stuck for party conversation, it was 43 200 kg in 1982!

Of course, there is the prospect of new or revised systems of data collection for the future; one of the appendices deals with such developments as the Child Health Computer System, the Neonatal Discharge Record, and the implications of the report of the Steering Group on Health Services Information. *Birth Counts* is an important and innovative book and I can confidently recommend it as an essential personal buy for anyone who is involved in the collection or interpretation of birth statistics. The companion volume of tables is perhaps a luxury for personal use; it is about twice the price of the main volume but it should certainly have a prominent place in reference libraries.

M L CHISWICK

Emergency Pediatrics. Edited by R M Barkin with P Rosen. Pp 772: £23.50 paperback. C V Mosby (Blackwell Scientific), 1984.

This promises to be a useful new paediatric textbook in a unique format, with the first and main sections of the book being problem orientated with liberal use of extensive tables and algorithms. The text is in note form throughout with a clear and generous layout covering not only true emergencies but most disorders that might present as acute paediatric admissions or

consultations. Appropriate emphasis is given in the early chapters to the real emergencies of child health, namely fluid and electrolyte disorders, cardiorespiratory support, and newborn emergencies.

The title of the next chapter 'Emergent Complaints' (sic) highlights one of the problems the book may have for most readers of this journal. Emergently ill children are apparently those requiring emergency treatment and not those developing an illness, as might be expected by users of Oxford English. The whole text is highly Americanised with extensive and superfluous use of abbreviations. Interpretation of the need for CPR would be unlikely to delay matters clinically as it stands for cardiopulmonary resuscitation but I remain uncertain as to what 'Vital signs and ABC' involves. Abbreviations are of course much more widely used. On the other side of the Atlantic and users of the book would soon become familiar with most. Use of American drug names, both generic and proprietary, is a familiar and less serious problem. An emphasis on adolescent and young adult medicine reflects the greater involvement of the American paediatricians with this age group.

One hundred and thirty pages in the middle are devoted to trauma and orthopaedics which is largely not of direct interest to children's physicians. The third major section of 230 pages entitled 'Diagnostic Categories' is a short systematic discussion of common disorders which is referred to extensively in the earlier section. Finally there are appendices on 'Techniques', 'Normal Data', 'Parent Instruction Sheets', and a 'Pharmacopoeia'—useful in parts, though limited. For example I could not find an alternative procedure to thoracostomy for insertion of a pneumothorax drain or advice for parents of children who have had febrile convulsions.

It is easy to criticise detail in a text book which is of necessity didactic and to some extent simplified, particularly in the algorithms, but I found little serious error, reasonable references, a good index, and overall a useful new approach especially suited to the doctor 'on the spot' as senior house officer or registrar.

JOHN TAPP