Book reviews

Epilepsy in Children. (International Review of Child Neurology Series). By J Aicardi. Pp 413: \$74.50 hardback. Raven Press, 1986.

It is a privilege to review this single author masterpiece on childhood epilepsy.

The volume is divided into four parts. It begins with a common sense discussion of the meaning of epilepsy, a definition of terms, the effect of age, and classification of epileptic seizures and epilepsies.

The second part deals individually and critically with the best established epilepsies and epileptic syndromes, emphasising the clinical seizure descriptions and electroencephalographic features necessary for giving treatment and prognosis; infantile spasms and such like, Lennox-Gastaut syndrome and early myoclonic epilepsies, later childhood myoclonic epilepsies, progressive myoclonic epilepsies, epilepsies with typical absences, epilepsies with generalised tonic-clonic seizures, epilepsies with simple partial seizures (including the benign epilepsies), epilepsies with partial complex and affective seizures, and the syndrome of 'acquired aphasia' (too often diagnosed as elective mutism!).

In the third section the perspective is altered to consider epileptic manifestations in relation to age, duration, 'cause', and precipitation, with chapters on neonatal seizures, epilepsy in infants (still a goldmine for future research), febrile convulsions, other occasional convulsions, status epilepticus, stimulus sensitive epilepsies, post-traumatic epilepsy, and epilepsies as the presenting manifestation of brain tumours.

The fourth part deals with selected aspects of diagnosis and differential diagnosis (including a critical analysis of anoxic seizures) and general aspects of prognosis and treatment that have not been covered

already when discussing specific epilepsies or clinical situations.

Sixty pages of the book are devoted to the bibliography, which is serially numbered in alphabetical order. Dr Aicardi states that he has attempted whenever possible to limit the review of the publications to books or articles of general interest that can serve as an introduction to further reading. Since one of the justifications of the book is the pooling together of information often available only in esoteric books, journals, or conference proceedings, however, it is no surprise that the references total around 1600. References up to 1986 are included, and some are 'in press'.

My only serious criticism is of the index, which was not compiled by the author himself. It is by no means brief, having 880 entries, but even so several items either are missing from the index or irritatingly require looking up under several headings to find an entry. This problem derives from the immense wealth of material in the book and could be corrected in a future edition. Meanwhile, readers should not be put off if they wish to find the answer to an undexed question—if necessary, read the book from cover to cover (again).

Doctors who treat children with convulsions or epilepsy should have this book both on their own shelves and in their departmental libraries.

J B P STEPHENSON

Nutrition and Growth in Infancy and Early Childhood. By N E Hitchcock, M Gracey, A I Gilmour, and E N Owles. Monographs in Paediatrics No 19. Pp 92: £31.00/SFr 79.00/DM 95.00/US \$44.00 hardback. Karger, 1986.

This well presented though rather brief monograph summarises the results of a five year prospective longitudinal study, known

as the Perth growth study, which followed growth and development in a homogeneous sample of 205 full term infants selected from a well nourished community. The book describes feeding practices, energy and nutrient intake, growth centiles, development, dentition and morbidity from birth to 5 years of age.

The sample contained a larger proportion of families from high social rank compared with the Western Australian population, but the authors defend their selection criteria on the grounds that their objective was to study infants living in an environment conducive to good health. While most infants were breast fed, unfortunately breast milk volumes were not measured so that nutrient intake calculations, which were restricted to foods that did not contain breast milk, sadly do not provide a complete picture. Duration of breast feeding had no significant protective effect against minor infection (documented by the mothers), probably because few children in the study lived in disadvantaged circumstances.

Numerous publications have already emerged from the Perth growth study, though this volume does represent a convenient summary of findings over the whole five years. Nevertheless, 92 pages is a small output from such a major endeavour. Detailed statistical analyses are not presented. While each chapter includes discussion of results, there is only brief mention of other, similar, longitudinal studies conducted in various parts of the world over past decades, and this does limit the educational value of the book.

This monograph has a high price for its size, but it is required reading for anyone entering the debate on the effects of early diet and growth. The Perth children will provide a valuable yardstick against which future generations can be assessed.

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