Book reviews


This book presents a personalized overall view of paediatrics for undergraduate students. Rightly, the stress throughout is mainly on the differences between paediatrics and adult medicine, and on the effects of age, growth, and development on different diseases and abnormalities and the ways in which they present. Apley’s commonsense approach to the whole child and his family, his wisdom, experience, humanity, and humour are apparent throughout the book, which is written in his usual easy readable style. The use of ‘I’ and ‘you’ may seem out of place in a standard stuffy textbook, but not in this book which is more a distillation of the author’s comprehensive knowledge of children and their diseases. Some of the chapter headings illustrate his ideas: You and the Child in Hospital, Not Mini-Adults; The Chronology of Disease, Illness and Growth, What is normal? Growth and Development, etc. Each system of the body has a chapter of its own, not forgetting skin diseases, bone and joint disorders, and collagen and muscle diseases. The book ends with chapters on The Newborn Infant and his Disorders, Nutrition and Feeding (why at the end of the book?), and finally, It Runs in the Family. There are some more technical appendices on fluid balance, drugs and doses, etc.

The best chapters are undoubtedly those on the general aspects of the diagnosis and management of the sick child and on the psychosomatic aspects of disease, areas of paediatrics to which Apley has made such a handsome contribution. The other chapters are simple and straightforward and give the undergraduate a good overall review. One can of course cavil at minor points: it is a little difficult to see why the stages of tuberculous meningitis are described in detail and why scurvy gets more than a page to itself, while congenital pyloric stenosis gets only six lines, apart from a description of the technique of feeling for the tumour. Why, too, does he rightly campaign against unnecessary tests and investigations and yet say, ‘When intussusception is suspected a barium enema and x-rays will be necessary’? One curious omission is that very little reference is made to the socially-deprived child and none whatsoever to the role of the Social Services Department, or any other agency, in dealing with children whose problems might well present to doctors in the first place. One can imagine some paediatric registrars and housemen (for whom the book is not intended), complaining that it is not ‘scientific’ enough, but if those who comment thus had a tithe of the author’s clinical skill and compassion, the care of children in this country would be vastly improved.

This book then is a refreshing change from the ordinary textbook, and can be warmly recommended to undergraduates as an introduction to the medical problems of children in a ‘western’ civilization.


This book deals with many of the aspects that affect children with mental retardation. Margaret Griffiths has gathered together a team of 13 contributors from the Birmingham region and together they have written 18 chapters covering early detection and developmental screening and biochemical testing. Sections are devoted to the special handicaps of blindness, deafness, speech disorders, and epilepsy. Particular mention is made of the hyperkinetic syndrome, and a number of chapters discuss the problems of prevention. Comprehensive assessment is very sensitively handled by Moore, and clearly reflects much experience in this field. It is heartening to see the stress laid on assessment in the nursery as developmental problems reveal themselves in their truest light in that setting or at home. The contributions that psychologists and educationalists make to the care and review of handicapped children is emphasized, though it is a pity that more information is not given on how the conclusions formed at the end of any assessment are translated into practical guidelines for parents and teachers who are desperately anxious to shape the development of their problem child. Jeavons’s chapter on epilepsy is clear and gives useful hints on management. The statement that the first fit requires investigation and not treatment deserves wider currency. Edwards’s contribution on genetic counselling is delightfully written and it is amusing to read about ‘normal mental deficiency’ with 50% of the population being below average, γ below the 10th centile, and γ below the second centile. That could include me and thee, and while it may have cold biological implications it should make us think twice when planning services. Would it be unkind to suggest that the genetic counsellor, like other practitioners of medicine, has a function beyond giving advice about preventative measures for subsequent pregnancies? Most parents come with feelings of guilt, anger, and inferiority which need as much discussion as do straight genetics.

Doctors looking for guidance about specific diagnoses of syndromes and diseases may be somewhat frustrated, but for those interested in handicapped children the book makes good reading. It should also be useful to members of other professions working in this field.