Book reviews


This book is concerned with the changes in posture which take place during infancy, childhood, adolescence and is based on a longitudinal study of 200 healthy children. As the author points out, variations occur during growth and these are not defects but are part of the child’s response to changes in body proportion and the effect of gravity. Variations in postural development often give rise to parental concern and are frequently the subject of consultation with general practitioners, school medical officers, paediatricians, and orthopaedic surgeons. Bow legs in infancy, knock knees in early childhood, and kyphosis in adolescence are all normal aspects of development and do not need specific treatment, but there have been very few studies of the normal child population to discover the extent of such variations.

The first five chapters are concerned with general standards of posture of the head, trunk, and lower limbs and their variations, with particular reference to the angle of inclination of the pelvis and the degree of lordosis that is normally present in different ages and in the two sexes. Postural patterns, patterns of walking, and the effects of differences in growth in the various segments of the body are described in children from birth to maturity.

The later chapters describe the incidence of postural variations in specific parts of the body. Studies of knock knee, which is particularly common at the age of 3½ years showed that, in all but a few, knock knee correction occurs spontaneously by the age of 7 years. I found it rather difficult to understand the explanation that the author gave for the existence of normal knock knee. She provides a detailed description of the radiological changes in the lower femoral epiphysis and then concludes that it cannot be responsible for developmental knock knee because children with knock knee show the same radiological changes as those without knock knee. Flat foot and valgus heels were studied by serial examination of footprints, study of foot length, and the height of longitudinal arch. She concluded that the arches of the foot do not alter in pattern and that each individual has his own shape of foot. Valgus heel, on the other hand, is used in posture to enable the child to redistribute weight as changes in body proportions occur. The final chapter discusses metatarsus primus varus (mistakenly referred to as metatarsus varus in some parts of the text) and hallux valgus, both of which she believes to be due to a congenital skeletal pattern favouring the development of hallux valgus which may be prevented by wearing suitable footwear.

While nothing very new is presented in this study it does serve a valuable purpose in bringing together in one volume all the features of postural variation in the spine, pelvis, knees, and feet previously studied separately. The text reads well and is supplemented by excellent line drawings and tables and figures.

This book should be of interest to anybody concerned with the physical welfare of children and could be read with equal advantage by paediatricians, orthopaedic surgeons, physiotherapists, remedial gymnasts, and specialists in physical education; it would not come amiss on the shelves of libraries for the use of medical students. I can thoroughly recommend it.


We have fortunately left behind the long period of simplistic theories that obesity was to be accounted for as the result of gluttony or ‘psychological’ factors, though current interest in the subject seems to be leading only to the conclusion that the causes of obesity remain a great puzzle. This healthy admission of ignorance at least clears the way to objective fact finding, and those who wish to be brought up to date with current work in childhood obesity will find this work worth attention. It is based on a symposium held in New York (the date of this is nowhere stated). The 13 contributions, all from American workers, are grouped under four sections: cellular changes; obesity during critical periods of growth; early nutrition and lipid metabolism; control of childhood obesity.

The opening chapter is by Hirsch, whose paper with Knittle, published in 1961, on the enumeration of the total fat cells in the body started a fresh and stimulating line of thought, with the idea of hyperplastic and hypertrophic obesity. His chapter on ‘Cell Number and Size as a Determinant of Subsequent Obesity’ is nevertheless something of a disappointment, as Hirsch deals only superficially with this, at present, highly debatable question. The view that (to quote Winick), ‘An interaction of genetic factors and early nutritional experience may program the number of fat cells within the various fat depots: once this program has been written it may be extremely difficult if not impossible to rewrite it,’ is an attractive one, but it would have been useful to have seen the evidence for and against it set out plainly. Had this been done the shakiness of much of the supporting evidence for the idea might have become apparent. However, in the following chapter S. B. Garn gives the results of his anthropometric observations extending over 20 years; his data being cross-sectional cannot provide the last word on the
question whether overfeeding in infancy often has long-term effects on later obesity, though they do argue against this view.

There are two useful chapters on what the paediatrician can do to prevent atherosclerosis—not unexpectedly in view of our ignorance about the causes of atherosclerosis the answer is at present, 'Not much,' though with respect to at least some of the predisposing factors (hypercholesterolemia, hypertension, cigarette smoking, obesity, and sedentary living) he may be able to play some part as adviser to the family.

Those who are wondering whether they should acquire this book for themselves could skim over the dozen introductory pages by Myron Winick which give an excellent summary of the individual contributions.


Take 120 paediatricians, diabetologists, endocrinologists, and psychologists from 20 countries, keep them happy in a small and slightly isolated vacation camp on the Mediterranean coast, arrange that they read a total of over 70 papers on their latest work, provide time for discussion and mixing, submit all to the firm direction of Zvi Laron, have the whole experience summarized by Stefan Fajans and you have almost everything known and unknown about diabetes mellitus in childhood. 3 years later you also have this elegantly produced book. It has lost little by the long delay which was occasioned in part by the 1973 Israeli War. The information was so recent, however, the discussion so good, the summary so lucid, that it still reads as news for most paediatricians interested in this, possibly the commonest metabolic disorder in childhood. It is, however, a book for the specially interested, since the 70 or more separate papers occupy 418 pages and include 178 figures and 111 tables. Its price in Britain makes it a possible investment for the medical school library rather than for the departmental one, far less for the individual paediatrician.

It begins appropriately with attempts to standardize the conduct and interpretation of glucose tolerance tests (GTTs)—illustrating the riddle 'when is a diabetic not a diabetic?'; answer, 'when his GTT is performed in this centre rather than in that', or even more cynically, 'when it is checked on this day rather than on that'. Fortunately, paediatricians have not the slightest difficulty in recognizing diabetes when they meet it, but the wider search for chemical diabetes in sibs and for glucose intolerance (another matter) in a list of over 30 syndromes is very difficult. So heterogeneous are the groups that agreement is necessarily difficult and clinicians naturally ask if it matters. It is here that papers focus attention on 'basement membrane thickening' and the growing evidence that it does not precede insulin deficiency but is caused by it, and that good control really does delay and reduce the dreaded complications of nephropathy, retinopathy, and atherosclerosis. If this is accepted, then of course it is important to recognize the prediabetic with a view to instituting prophylactic therapy. Possible ways of doing so are then discussed.

A sound definition of good control remains elusive but there is much, though not universal, agreement that morning and evening injections are needed to achieve it. Children are found to accept them much more often than some claim. The book groups papers which deal with important psychosomatic aspects of the disease and its treatment and with ambulatory rather than hospital care. Space is naturally devoted to aetiology, but little new emerges. The book is primarily concerned with recognizing diabetes and providing care which recognizes the need for sound balance between physical control aimed at present and future bodily well being and psychological handling concerned with helping the diabetic child to become an adult able to live life to the full. Small wonder that Dr. Fajans, veteran of so many meetings, describes this particular International Symposium as a unique experience. This book captures that message.


The author draws heavily from his own clinical and research experience in both Sidney and London, which gives a convincing authority to much of this textbook. The space allocated to the different disorders mirrors the incidence of these in paediatric practice. Aetiological factors, pathophysiology, and morbid anatomy are fully covered, but much of the text is devoted to clinical manifestations, diagnosis, and management. The value of special investigations is carefully examined.

Developments in gastroenteritis, before many of the recent viral studies, in coeliac disease and in sugar malabsorption are fully covered, together with a useful section on surgical lesions. Problems in the diagnosis and management of the poorly defined disorder protein intolerance are lucidly considered. This reviewer would have appreciated a fuller clinical description and critical assessment of the relevant literature on the rare disorders mentioned in the chapter on miscellaneous conditions, but ample recent references are supplied here and throughout the book. For the clinician concerned with the diagnosis and treatment of children with gastrointestinal symptoms it seems a pity to omit all consideration of disorders of the large bowel, a point which will surely be considered in future editions.

This book must be read by all paediatricians whether they be generalists or paediatric gastroenterologists, if they care for children with gastroenterological disorders. Gastroenterologists treating adults will find in it much of interest.

Urethral Obstruction in Boys. Diagnosis and Treatment of Congenital Valves of the Posterior Urethra. By C. Cornil. (Pp. 157; illustrated +