

Book reviews

Research on Children. Medical Imperatives, Ethical Quandaries, and Legal Constraints. Edited by J. van Eys. (Pp. 152; illustrated + tables. £5.95, paperback.) University Park Press: Baltimore. 1978.

The ethical, legal, and practical issues concerned with medical research in children are a natural and obvious subject for discussion meetings. This paperback reports a workshop held in 1977 at the University of Texas System Cancer Center. The 'medical imperatives' in the subtitle refer mainly to the necessity for clinical trials in potentially fatal illnesses like malignancy. The 'legal constraints' are the varied interpretations of the law (discussed much more concisely in Professor Dworkin's article in this issue). The 'ethical quandaries' are more difficult to summarise—they are discussed at length, but not always clearly, by theologians and others.

Good meetings do not necessarily make good books, and the researcher who thinks from the title of this volume that it will provide straightforward answers to his problems, or even clear summaries of current opinions, will be disappointed. The fact that most of the participants are associated with one of the world's most famous and successful institutes for treatment of malignant disease meant that they were also much concerned with other emotionally charged issues like the care of the dying child, and I am not sure that it aided clarity to discuss these alongside the ethics of benign investigations on well children. The defence of therapeutic trials on children with malignant disease was well done but there can surely be few who would dispute the ethics of and the necessity for such trials.

Though the proceedings of a meeting were unlikely to provide a concise textbook of the law and ethics for would-be researchers, they might have made more interesting and stimulating reading if the participants had been less longwinded and diffuse. No doubt they sounded more interesting at the time. Finally the editor gives an odd slant to the book by his insistence in the preface and the epilogue that society and adults do not really like children.

R. ROBINSON

Diseases of Children in the Subtropics and Tropics. 3rd edition. Edited by D. B. Jelliffe and J. Paget Stanfield. (Pp. 1049; illustrated + tables. £25.00.) Arnold: London. 1978.

This is the third edition of a book which, since it was first published in 1958, has served as the most comprehensive account of diseases of children in the tropics and subtropics. The scope and contents are similar to previous editions and touch on all aspects of paediatrics but in variable depth. The editors' task of collecting and collating material from over 80 contributors, among whom paediatricians are in the minority, was formidable. They have done well but have only been partially successful in creating a cohesive volume out of a series of monographs by clinicians, pathologists, nutritionists, parasitologists, virologists etc., not all of whom combine long experience in the tropics with expertise and insight into paediatric practice. 5 pages of Chapter 2 had been misplaced in Chapter 3, to the confusion of the reader.

The handling of malaria illustrates both the strengths and the weaknesses of this book. An excellent chapter on the subject by an expert provides an authoritative account of all aspects of the disease, but in some other sections of the book there is dangerous neglect of the subject. Thus, cerebral malaria receives only a passing mention under the subheading 'Encephalitis' in the chapter on 'Disorders of the Central Nervous System', and the need for malaria chemoprophylaxis is not mentioned in connection with the use of prednisolone and cytotoxic drugs advocated in treatment of diseases like the nephrotic syndrome and Burkitt's lymphoma, which are prevalent in endemic malarious areas. Neglect of this aspect of management may have lethal consequences for the immunosuppressed patient. Therapeutics has on the whole been unevenly handled. Treatment of some diseases, e.g. tuberculosis and schistosomiasis, is given in great detail and takes into account realities of practice in developing countries. On the other hand, the entire section on endocrinology excludes any reference to treatment, and recommendations for the

management of leukaemia, though intrinsically sound, are largely inapplicable in most developing countries.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, this book will be of value to all doctors concerned with child health in the tropics, but will best serve those who recognise both its strengths and its limitations. It should also be available to medical students, but at £25 per copy its availability is likely to be restricted.

R. G. HENDRICKSE

Shorter notices

Obstetrics and the Newborn. By Norman A. Beischer and Eric V. Mackay. (Pp. 534; illustrated + tables. £8.50.) Saunders: Sydney, Philadelphia, Toronto, London. 1976.

This book for students has two noteworthy features. It covers in considerable depth obstetrics, and also (in somewhat less depth) neonatal medicine, though surprisingly both authors are professors of obstetrics. The illustrations are lavishly numerous, often coloured, and in many instances of particular originality and effectiveness, sometimes even rather horrifically so.

Antimicrobial Chemotherapy for Newborns. Practical Application of Pharmacology to Clinical Usage. By George H. McCracken and John D. Nelson. (Pp. x + 177; illustrated + tables. US\$16.50, paperback.) New York: Grune and Stratton. 1977.

The unique physiology of the newborn baby, with the low levels of various enzymes and diminished glomerular and tubular renal function means that the pharmacokinetics of this age group is a law to itself, hence the justification for this small but useful monograph.