Book reviews

Paediatric Therapeutics. Edited by H. B. Valman. (Pp. 231; illustrated + tables. £7.75 paperback.) Blackwell: Oxford. 1979.

Any book devoted solely to treatment inevitably raises a doubt—is it really feasible to separate treatment from diagnosis, prognosis, and the rest? This principle apart, the rate of change of treatments tends to be rapid, new techniques and new drugs are being introduced all the time, old drugs and antibiotics are re-evaluated, given in different dosages, or become ineffective for various reasons, such as bacterial resistance. Hence I have hitherto looked with little favour on those massive and wordy volumes devoted to paediatric therapy which are almost as big as a complete textbook of paediatrics. Within a year or two they are already out of date and are to be seen growing dusty and unused on the shelves.

Coming to this book, my prejudices were disarmed by finding that both O. H. Wolff in his Foreword and the Editor in his Preface themselves frankly discuss the objections to books devoted solely to treatment, and they supply arguments to justify publication of this particular book. Firstly, we seem to be entering a new era where drugs can be used more rationally, based on expanding knowledge of their pharmacokinetics and the increasing use of measurements of serum levels. So the first 3 of the book's 12 chapters are sensibly devoted to the fundamental aspects of the subject.

Secondly, the unpretentious format of the book, a paperback of 230 pages with a limited number of authors, has enabled rapid publication (I noted at least one 1978 reference) and will, it is to be expected, facilitate frequent new editions.

The remaining 9 chapters are devoted to

epilepsy (B. D. Bower, to whom thanks for his forthright appraisal of phenobarbitone 'probably has little place . . .'), urinary infections (J. M. Smellie), nephrosis (T. M. Barratt), respiratory infections (H. Simpson), asthma (R. S. Jones), gastroenteritis (H. B. Valman), neonatal bacterial infection (P. M. Davies), leukaemia (T. M. McElwain), and diabetes (D. B. Grant). Judged by the criterion of whether an article provides something more than merely dealing with its subject in a way any standard textbook might do, I judged the majority did so, but there did seem very little new to say about the therapy of either gastroenteritis or diabetes.

One minor and possibly pedantic quibble, although drug dosage expressed as mg/kg/day is admittedly understood by everybody, this strictly does not mean mg. kg⁻¹. day⁻¹ and would be better eliminated from a book designed to make clinical medicine more scientific.

In sum, an admirable book which should be the forerunner of many editions.

DOUGLAS GAIRDNER

Pulmonary Disease of the Fetus, Newborn, and Child. Edited by E. M. Scarpelli, P. A. M. Auld, and H. S. Goldman. (Pp. 680; illustrated + tables. £37.50 hardback.) Lea & Febiger: Philadelphia. 1978.

This is the companion volume to *Pulmonary Physiology of the Fetus, Newborn, and Child* (1975). There are no fewer than 23 contributors to the 19 chapters and the problems of multiple authorship have not been entirely overcome, stricter editing might have avoided some of the pitfalls

and resulted in a smaller, less expensive book.

The best chapters are those dealing with intensive care; in particular, the one on airway management and cardiopulmonary resuscitation is a model of clarity and brevity. There are also 2 chapters devoted to neonatal intensive care and the various forms of respiratory distress in the newborn. Each contains some excellent practical guidelines although some of the advice given—for example, on the use and abuse of umbilical catheters—would be highly controversial in this country; for some inexplicable reason these 2 chapters are irritatingly separated by one on the pathology of developmental anomalies of the lung. A section on thoracic surgery includes quite a lot of surgical technique which, although not sufficiently detailed for surgeons, contains helpful hints for paediatricians who are left 'holding the baby' postoperatively. The chapter on pulmonary radiology contains many clear x-rays illustrating the common and some very uncommon conditions; there are also practical tips on how to interpret unusual x-ray appearances. The sections on infections and chronic pulmonary disease are competent but unexceptional. The remaining chapters deal with general topics—such as, pathophysiology, inhalation therapy anaesthesia, sudden infant death, and extrapulmonary disease. Each chapter is supplemented with useful references.

Taken as a whole this book gives a reasonable overall view of respiratory diseases and their management. It would be of value to the general paediatrician who is called upon to deal with acute and chronic respiratory problems, but it cannot be recommended as an unqualified 'best buy'.

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