adequate discussion which makes both reading and understanding difficult; this is particularly apparent in a chapter on abnormalities of sexual differentiation, but other chapters, where the endocrine problems are less complex, are more easily read.

These difficulties should not deter the interested reader, and for those who are prepared to read slowly and carefully all the information is available. With the present dearth of paediatric endocrine textbooks I would, despite the criticisms, recommend this book for the hospital library.

D C L SAVAGE


Dr Harper, Reader and Consultant in Medical Genetics at the Welsh National School of Medicine, set himself a formidable task when writing this book. He emphasises that it is intended primarily for clinicians in family practice and hospital specialties; and it is clear that he hopes to encourage more doctors to do their own genetic counselling.

To succeed the book must first persuade doctors that they can handle certain genetic problems which they would have previously either side-stepped or referred elsewhere; and secondly, it must provide enough accurate factual information to allow them to carry out the task properly. There is an ever present danger of succeeding with the first aim, but falling short on the second, and for this reason such a book must be judged by the most exacting standards.

Although I think it unlikely that any other clinical geneticist in Britain could have surpassed this work, I have some general reservations, and the few almost inevitable factual errors must be corrected in future editions. In the first 8 chapters all the general aspects of genetic counselling in Mendelian, non-Mendelian, and chromosomal disorders are covered. There is also a general account of prenatal diagnosis, carrier detection, and consanguinity, as well as of topics such as non-paternity, and artificial insemination by donor. These chapters should encourage clinicians to tackle genetic problems, but it is doubtful whether this book alone could enable them to acquire some of the specialist skills such as pedigree analysis in Duchenne muscular dystrophy—a view supported by the author’s hollow exhortation not to be faint-hearted because even some clinical geneticists get this calculation wrong! The relaxed style of writing is full of practical hints derived from the author’s own considerable experience of genetic clinics, and this is where he has scored over the recent multi-author books on the subject from the USA.

The second half of the book covers individual diseases in a series of 15 short chapters on specific organ systems. The entries vary considerably in detail, usefulness, and accuracy, reflecting Dr Harper’s own areas of expertise. At this point one begins to wonder if a multi-author text might not be preferable, but I think that would be the wrong approach. It might be better to be more selective and include a little more detail rather than have a lot of disorders covered by only a few lines. Another problem for which there is no easy answer is whether lists of diseases, grouped under their usual type of inheritance, are useful. Some readers would be misled by the table “Mendelian disorders causing or frequently associated with mental retardation”. Neurofibromatosis and Duchenne muscular dystrophy are followed by the comment “not constant”, which might imply that mental retardation was constant in all the other disorders listed, which clearly it was not.

I think this will be a popular book and, on balance, it makes a positive contribution to genetic counselling. The greatest omission is a definition of which situations are generally best handled by a clinical geneticist or a specialist with a very great interest in the genetics of the disorder; without this I think the main effect will be to increase referrals to genetic clinics rather than to increase the genetic counselling in general clinics.

MARCUS PEMBREY


This book is of American multi-authorship with two main author/editors whose experience in dealing with every aspect of care of the developmentally disabled is clear throughout the text. Their main aim is to provide primary care medical and paramedical personnel with the skills necessary to screen, diagnose, evaluate, and develop treatment plans.

To date this is one of the best books in its field that I have read, and it is very suitable for doctors interested in developmental paediatrics. Research on both sides of the Atlantic is well represented and up to date although the testing procedures are inadequately described and, despite a good general chapter on intervention, discussion of exact management and critical evaluation of therapeutic interventions is missing. In general this book deals with single major disabling conditions; the severely multiply handicapped child presents particular assessment and therapeutic challenges.

Two of the most important questions that the primary care doctor has to answer are “Can he see?”, and “Can he hear?” Well-evaluated methods of testing young children of different ages which are useful also for testing the mentally or physically handicapped child are inadequately described.

The first four chapters on ‘Children at risk of neuro-developmental disability’ and ‘Early assessment’ are particularly good. It would have been helpful in the chapter on ‘Hearing loss’ to have learnt about language acquisition in the deaf, how to encourage this, alternative communication, and additional problems—such as behaviour—as well as to learn of the influence on language and school learning of mild hearing loss due to catarrh, and how to test the hearing of children of different ages. Several scales for neurodevelopmental assessment are described and compared, but yet another format is described later without details about its evaluation. The differing aetiologies of different categories of mental retardation are not mentioned, and the role of disadvantaged social circumstances plus minor disabling conditions could have been stressed. The section on ‘Programme planning for the visually handicapped’ by Carol Donovan is helpful and practical, but the sections on ‘Therapeutic management with language and motor disabilities’ are less good and the primary care physician will learn little about what the physiotherapist actually does, or should do, or the work of the speech therapist in a language intervention programme, although the team approach to planned therapy is stressed. Medical assessment is also described at length in ‘Learning disabilities’ but the significance of the findings and critical evaluation of therapy is not clear.

These criticisms are those of omission, and they also indicate the gaps of current