Book reviews

Crib Death: The Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. By Warren G. Guntheroth. Pp 219: \$60.75 hardback. New York: Futura, 1982.

Failure to obtain a grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Development gave Professor Guntheroth the time to write this personal monograph on cot death. As a cardiologist and physiologist interested in the subject since 1957, he has had the clinical experience and lived through the political turmoils of modern research into this subject. He has carried out a critical review of the published research and leaves the reader with no doubt about his conclusions.

The chapters include pathology, epidemiology, and theories of cardiovascular, respiratory, and other causes of sudden infant death. There are also chapters on maternal factors and management and prevention including research priorities. The index contains over 450 references including the most recently published articles.

Research into the sudden infant death syndrome has been punctuated by banner headlines of a new cause following the publication of an abstract describing 2 or 3 cases. Shortly afterwards a study of 25 patients produced the opposite conclusion and the theory was finally demolished by an exhaustive study costing hundreds of thousands of dollars. If only Professor Guntheroth could have been introduced to the research worker before he presented his initial 2 patients, a great deal of time and expense might have been saved.

Professor Guntheroth is clearly a good teacher because he spices the narrative with rapier thrusts against his opponents. When he is discussing the possibility that monitors produce parental anxiety he says that to blame the monitor is similar to executing the messenger who brings bad news.

His final conclusion is that the single most effective remedy for SIDS is a general improvement in maternal and infant health, but he mentions that this idea is not acceptable to the American public. Perhaps this applies equally to this country. Simply providing a million dollars to a scientist does not automatically generate a hypothesis that can, or

should be tested as the cause or treatment of this syndrome. This remark will not make him popular with fund raising bodies.

This book will become the standard reference book on the sudden infant death syndrome and provided Professor Guntheroth is refused further grants he may have the energy and time to provide further editions. The next time a parent asks you why the cause of sudden infant death syndrome has not yet been discovered, you will need a copy of this book to hand to him.

H B VALMAN

Clinical Reactions to Food. Edited by M H Lessof. Pp 222: £14.50. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1983.

The publication of this volume is most appropriate at a time when both medical and lay public are subjected to numerous observations (often anecdotal, poorly substantiated, and uncontrolled) on the beneficial and adverse effects of foods. The introductory chapter by Professor MacDonald is a refreshingly objective review of the available evidence to support many of the contemporary dietary beliefs including those relating to obesity, fibre, 'natural' foods, and salt intake. When examined in this way the hard evidence available to support some of the quite firmly held beliefs is relatively scanty. Unfortunately, there is no mention of the well established neurological role of vitamin E.

The confusing interrelation of food 'intolerance', 'idiosyncrasy', and 'allergy' are clearly reviewed as well as the available evidence that foods may play an aetiological role in rheumatoid arthritis, colitis, and multiple sclerosis. The quite definite role of cows' milk protein intolerance in most infants with haemorrhagic colitis should perhaps be emphasised for paediatricians. The differing approaches of the three main groups of professionals interested in food allergy (general physicians, allergists, and ecologists) are reviewed, and it is correctly emphasised that much of the basis of the ecologists' practice has yet to be put to proper controlled trials.

Patients' attitudes to foods are reviewed in detail by Dr Lacey—a helpful chapter

on a topic where subjective attitudes are so important. Immunological and physical aspects of digestion are covered by Dr Ferguson, and this provides a useful review of the subject, in particular with considerable information on intestinal permeability which may be an important area for future research. The clinical aspects of food allergy and intolerance are comprehensively reviewed by Professor Lessof in adults, and in children by Professor Soothill. Both these chapters represent very clear reviews of the present day knowledge on the subject, although Professor Soothill's assertion that eczema is 'probably largely food allergy' would not at present receive general acceptance. The chapter on false food allergies is a comprehensive account of non-immunological food reactions, eg effects of histamine, tyramine, phenylethylamine, and alcohol intolerance. It is an excellent review of the subject, as is the detailed section on migraine by Dr Hanington. The review on coeliac disease is excellent but the facts are well established; perhaps the discussion on intolerance to other dietary proteins is more valuable.

Professor Lessof achieves his stated purpose of providing an objective examination of the problem. The clear examination of the main adverse effects of foods without too rigid a commitment to the immunological, biochemical, or psychological aspects has resulted in a balanced up to date review of the subject.

The book is excellent and is recommended reading for dermatologists, gastroenterologists, chest physicians, and paediatricians. A more widespread knowledge of these established facts on the subject would reduce the need for the many self appointed dietary experts, support groups, and self styled allergists who prey on the unfortunate individuals who consider, rightly or wrongly, that they suffer from clinical reactions to food.

J M LITTLEWOOD

Handicapped Children in the Community. By G E Wood. Pp 124: £4.95 paperback. Bristol: Wright, 1983.

Professional people caring for handicapped children are able to cooperate