

## Book reviews

**Children: a handbook for children's doctors.** Edited by P Gray and F Cockburn. Pp 374: £30.00 hardback. Pitman, 1984.

This is an outstanding book. It covers numerous difficult topics usually left out of conventional disease-orientated paediatric textbooks and thus fills an important gap, particularly for clinical medical officers, general practitioners, and paediatricians in training.

It is indeed a handbook, centred on 'the assessment of hearing, seeing, thinking and growing' and packed with practical information. It begins with a good chapter on normal growth and a discussion of the factors that may influence growth with, for example, straightforward information about how to evaluate an underweight child or an obese one. This is followed by equally useful chapters on practical medical genetics, nutrition and metabolism, and interviewing children and parents.

Three chapters cover normal neurological development, mental handicap, and neurological disorders (divided into eight sections). Especially good are the sections on 'The child who does not walk' and 'The child who fails at school'. There are two chapters on visual and hearing development and assessment, followed by a three section chapter on language and speech containing another excellent contribution by Ruth Day on 'The child who does not talk'. There are chapters on social development, emotional development, behaviour disorders, educational medicine (in three parts), immunisation, epidemiology, the environment (school and physical), and a five part chapter on social paediatrics (with particularly good sections on the law, adoption and child abuse, and on disabled school leavers). There are two chapters on common infections, two on death and cot death, and a final one on malformations and orthopaedic conditions which includes tables of teratogens and their effect; and a table about drugs and breast feeding.

The remaining 100 pages contain particularly useful appendices including a huge list of voluntary organisations for children with disabilities; helpful tables of biochemical and haematological normal ranges; growth, head circumference, and puberty staging charts; an innovative table of variations in growth patterns; a timetable of normal milestones and motor develop-

ments; details of the Goodenough-Harris drawing test, the Cardiff modifications of the Denver developmental screening test and the Woodside assessment test; information about neonatal reflexes and their possible significance if abnormal, accompanied by details of the Dubowitz score for clinical assessment of gestational age in newborns; a list of anticonvulsants, their dosage, their therapeutic range, and their side effects.

T J DAVID

**Low Birth Weight. A Medical, Psychological, and Social Study.** Edited by R Illsley and R Mitchell. Pp 272: £28.00 hardback. John Wiley and Sons, 1984.

This book reports the outcome at age 10 years of a one year cohort of legitimate Caucasian singletons weighing 2500 g or less at their birth in Aberdeen Maternity Hospital during 1969-70. The study group contained 149 low birthweight survivors and an equal number of legitimate Caucasian singleton controls. These were next born infants weighing over 2500 g who could be matched for five characteristics—sex, maternal height, parity, smoking, and paternal social class. The present state of knowledge with regard to low birthweight is briefly reviewed, the sociological, medical, and psychological aspects of the study described, and the ways in which the children were traced and interviewed are recorded. As expected, when compared with the control children at age 10 years, the low birthweight group were shorter and lighter, had abnormal neurological findings more commonly, and had needed hospital admission for illness more frequently. They also had a greater incidence of mental and educational subnormality, and showed impairment in intelligence, perceptuo-motor skills, academic performance, and behaviour ratings. The differences, though significant, were never large and were most noticeable at the lowest birthweights or in the presence of intrauterine growth retardation.

Aberdeen, whose ordered calm has undergone change by oil in the decade since these births, has long been a pioneer centre in its concern for the well being of the mother and her newborn infant; and it is wholly appropriate that Sir Dugald Baird

should contribute the foreword to this book. In so far as 98% of births in the city take place in hospital, and 98% of the combined index and control groups were traced at age 10 years, this can reasonably be regarded as a geographically defined population study, as the editors claim. The talented team recruited by Professors Illsley and Mitchell have taken great pains to judge the relative importance to outcome of the maternal antecedents of low birthweight, neonatal illness, postnatal environment, and external influences during childhood. The imperfection of father's social class as a matching factor for controls is acknowledged, for the parental control group were found to be superior in vocabulary, fluency of expression, organisation of thought, recreational activities, and in the ways they hoped to influence their children's development. Final assessment of the wealth of carefully collected data, much of it subjected to regression analyses, led the editors to conclude that 'while better antenatal and postnatal care remain desirable, improvements in physical and intellectual outcome for low birthweight children are substantially dependent upon improvements in the quality of the social environments into which the children are born and in which they grow and develop'. The suggestion that strained financial resources would be more profitably spent on research into still unanswered questions in this sphere rather than on 'the over lavish provision and equipment of hospital units' will doubtless be hotly debated by those involved in perinatal care. It is to be hoped though that they will read this excellent book, for it will surely stand as a model of its kind.

PAMELA A DAVIES

**The Child with a Handicap.** By D M B Hall. Pp 537: £35.00 hardback. Blackwell, 1984.

This excellent book has a scope far wider than its title suggests. The first part covers the general nature of development, intelligence, and the detection of and reactions to handicap. The second part describes specific neurological and developmental disorders, including epilepsy and child abuse, but excluding other chronic diseases such as asthma or haemophilia.