Book reviews

Fetal Physiology and Medicine. The Basis of Perinatology. (Reproductive Medicine vol 6). 2nd ed. Edited by R W Beard and P W Nathanielsz. Pp 823: £70.00 hardback. Marcel Dekker (Butterworths), 1984.

Despite the fact that the concept of 'perinatal medicine' has met with general acceptance, at least as an idea, there remains a temptation, to which most of us succumb on occasion, to regard the existence of the newborn infant as having begun on the labour ward. It is true that at present we are rather limited in what we can discover about the personal 'past history' of the individual baby, but there is now a mass of information about the common past of all babies which is the key to understanding postnatal adaptation and many neonatal conditions, and is therefore fundamental to the practice of neonatal paediatrics.

Unfortunately, because advances in knowledge in this field have been so rapid and so much based on animal work (of which none but the truly informed are in a position to assess the relevance), it has hitherto been no easy task for the interested clinician to accumulate a useful body of information. That is why this book, which gathers together in one volume authoritative reviews of many of the most important areas of materno-fetal physiology and medicine, is so welcome.

The topics covered include materno-fetal immunological interaction; fetal breathing and lung maturation; fetal cardiovascular control; fetal, placental, and maternal hormones; many aspects of fetal growth and metabolism and materno-fetal exchange; the effects of hypoxia on the fetal brain; sexual differentiation; maternal and fetal acid based balance; and, if this is not enough to whet the appetite, there is also an extremely well illustrated chapter of antenatal diagnosis by ultrasound and two quite comprehensive chapters on fetal monitoring.

One aspect of the brief given to contributors seems to have been not only to review the best of the published reports in their field but also to make a definite attempt to bridge the gap between basic science and clinical practice. The considerable extent to which many of them have succeeded in this task adds greatly to the relevance of the book to the practising paediatrician.

Each chapter is very adequately referenced, and the balance between text, diagrams, and tables has been well judged. A lot of effort has gone into the layout and presentation which makes the book a pleasure to read, although perhaps the index would benefit from expansion.

Sadly, the price will inevitably make many people think twice about obtaining a personal copy. We can only hope that by the time the next edition is ready, which in view of the pace of development in this field will hopefully not be too many years hence, exchange rates will be more favourable.

P R F DEAR

Recent Advances in Paediatrics No 7. Edited by R Meadow. Pp 234: £18.00 hardback. Churchill Livingstone, 1984.

Recent Advances in Paediatrics does not need a review; successive volumes have established the series as obligatory reading for paediatricians. We have come to expect authoritative, interesting, and relevant accounts of progress and although the new editor, Professor Roy Meadow, comments that over recent years there have been few sensational advances in paediatric practice, his choice of subjects and authors makes this volume worthy of its predecessors.

What is provided for our bedtime reading? Some chapters give practical advice about common or worrying problems: when to start and stop anticonvulsants, approach and duration of antibiotic treatment, management of hypertension, the wheezy infant, and dietary management of diabetes. In others we are guided through confusing country: carrier detection and genetic disorders, food allergy, investigation of gastrointestinal disease, and screening for cystic fibrosis. Perhaps the most exciting advances of recent years are in the field of genetics and we are given a fascinating glimpse of these in a chapter on the new genetics and prevention of disease.

Best of all are two essays that delight by their revelations of unorthodox and stimulating minds, 'Ethical trends in modern paediatrics' by Professor John Davis and 'Factitious illness - the hinterland of child abuse' by the editor himself.

But what is omitted? Chapters on newborn care no longer belong to this volume as there is now a series of *Recent Advances in Perinatal Medicine*. It is disappointing, however, that explorations into community care, the changing epidemiology of childhood illness, sexual abuse and psychiatric illness, and paediatric care in the developing world receive no mention. There is no shortage of subjects for volume 8 in this series and we hope that Professor Meadow is already planning it.

J M PARKIN

The Pathophysiology of Infantile Malnutrition. Protein-Energy Malnutrition and Failure to Thrive. By E Kerpel-Fronius. Pp 312: £15.40 hardback. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1983.

It was a pleasure to review this book, and its publication a few months before the death of the author was a fitting farewell for a distinguished and admired paediatrician.

There are 24 chapters: some are quite short while the longer ones are carefully divided into sections and subsections so that it is very easy to find what is said on a particular topic. Although there is constant reference to work in developing countries and many of the references cited originate there, this is also the work of a European paediatrician—the failure to thrive of heart disease and of cerebral disorders is discussed, but there is nothing on the light for gestational age baby. Some chapters have clinical titles for example 'Clinical manifestations . . .' others pathophysiological ones such as 'Renal function', or 'The endocrine glands . . .' but in fact many of them are a successful amalgam of the pathophysiological and clinical for example 'Carbohydrate metabolism' includes a detailed discussion of the problem of hypoglycaemia. One feels the hand of the experienced clinician well steeped in the physiology of his subject. Indeed this combination is the strength of the book—a fusion which has been less apparent in other books on the subject in recent years.

In contrast, perhaps, one criticism is the small amount of epidemiological data included, which are mostly limited to the long term studies of brain function, and so