Book reviews

Schaffer's Diseases of the Newborn. 5th ed. Edited by M E Avery and H W Taeusch Jr. Pp 1012: £68.75 hardback. Philadelphia, London: W B Saunders, 1984.

Big books pose problems for reviewers. If you 'dip in' you risk selecting only those subjects about which you have firm and biased views. If you do a 'cover to cover job' then by the time you have read the book it is history and no one is interested in your review. I compromised—I dipped in when I genuinely needed help with clinical problems and I carried the book to committee meetings where I read neonatal topics that had never previously excited me. I argued that even the congenital chondrodystrophies would be a relief. Whichever way I approached *Schaffer's diseases of the newborn* it was a sheer joy to read.

The first edition appeared over 20 years ago and the high standard is maintained in this the fifth edition. There is a very wide coverage of neonatal topics by 29 contributors who write succinctly and in a way which indicates that they too have stood by the incubator and pondered over the very same problems that might cause us to refer to the book for information.

As well as the usual system orientated chapters there are helpful accounts of prenatal genetic diagnosis, fetal growth and adaptation, neonatal behaviour and its significance, and neonatal pharmacology.

The layout of the book is particularly attractive—double column print with a clear arrangement of bold headings and subheadings. This disciplines the contributors to present their information in a logical well thought out way. The black and white photographs, including most of the radiographs, are sharp and the figures and tables are very well set out. On the whole, the text is well referenced and the index—18 pages of it—works. There are very useful appendices giving information ranging from the rather esoteric—normal serum copper values in babies of different gestational ages—to the usual conversion tables enabling you to tell parents the proper weight of their baby in pounds and ounces (or just ounces).

As for the gaps that inevitably appear in books of this nature, I would like to have seen the concept of a continuum extended

beyond the neonatal period. For example, a chapter devoted to handicap in relation to specific perinatal disorders and a chapter on the vulnerability of low birthweight and ill neonates after their discharge from hospital would be of great value. Another gap, bearing in mind the worldwide readership, is an account of comparative international perinatal mortality statistics.

The price of this book may dismay you but do not think merely in terms of the cost of print and paper. Think instead of the valuable time and effort the editors and contributors have put into it. I can strongly recommend this book to all paediatricians and others whose work involves caring for newborn babies.

M L CHISWICK

Recent Advances in Epilepsy. Edited by T A Pedley and B S Meldrum. Pp 255: £19.50 paperback. London, Melbourne, New York: Churchill Livingstone, 1983.

This is the first of a planned series of publications on epilepsy which aim, according to the preface, to present 'authoritative reviews of issues of immediate importance to physicians treating epilepsy.' The editors of this volume have chosen their authors well and in general the contributions conform to their requirements. Each contributor reviews the subject extensively, on the whole achieving a balanced view, and ends his chapter with a full and up to date bibliography (1981-2).

For the paediatrician the chapters on specific drugs (phenytoin (Dam), valproate (Dreifuss), and carbamazepine (Troupin)), on anticonvulsant drugs in the newborn and infants, on salivary drug concentrations, and on infantile spasms will be of most interest. The published reports on each of the drugs named above are summarised briefly but adequately enough for the practising clinician, particularly if he uses the accompanying list of references. These three chapters, however, are paralleled in many recent publications on epilepsy, which is probably why their texts have been kept short. Less easily available are balanced reviews on salivary drug monitoring (Knott) and the use of anti-epileptic drugs in the newborn and infant

(Dodson), and I rate these as particularly useful contributions. In 25 pages Bellman gives an excellent summary of the extensive published reports on infantile spasms, more critical and up to date than Lacy and Penry's much longer review of 1976 and, therefore, with its accompanying references, of considerably more use to the paediatrician or neurologist today.

Of less practical relevance are the 'forward look' chapters by Meldrum on the likely directions which research into central neurotransmission will take, by Kellaway and Frost on the biorhythmic modulation of epileptic events, and by van Belle and Temkin on the problems of the clinical evaluation of new drugs. But they make interesting armchair reading, as do the chapters on the behaviour of epileptic people (Trimble on temporal lobe epilepsy and Treiman and Delgado-Escueta on violence) and that of Binnie on that popular technological development, telemetric electroencephalographic monitoring.

The contributions are all of a high standard and the book should certainly be in every postgraduate medical library. Those chapters mentioned in my second paragraph should be read by every paediatrician and then have a place on his literature card index for at least the next five years.

BRIAN BOWER

Pediatric Epileptology: classification and management of seizures in the child. Edited by F E Dreifuss. Pp 302: £30.00 hardback. Boston, Bristol, London: John Wright, 1983.

When I began to read this book, especially the early chapters on the new classification of seizures, genetics, electroencephalograms, and absence seizures, I was most impressed. I felt we now had a much needed up to date review of the published reports on childhood seizures. The presentation of the new classification is a definite improvement on the original article in *Epilepsia* (1981). The clinical descriptions of the seizures are excellent and the fact that there are more than 1100 references will, I know, appeal to many.

The format of the chapter on absence