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

seizures viz classification, incidence, genetics, aetiology, clinical manifestations, diagnosis, differential diagnosis, treatment, course, and prognosis has much to commend it. It allows the reader, with the help of an excellent index, to find quickly the information he requires. Unfortunately this format is not used throughout, for example generalised tonic-clonic seizures are allocated three pages, without headings, and the last paragraph on prognosis is not helpful as it provides no facts, figures, or references.

The review of febrile seizures by Nelson and Ellenberg is comprehensive. They state that the safety and efficacy of treatment with rectal diazepam has to be evaluated further. They do not mention that many febrile seizures are about to remit spontaneously by the time treatment is given. To state that febrile seizures are 'brief and self limited' is not of much value. They conclude that the value of prophylactic treatment has not been proved and state that sample size and duration of follow up would make such a study extremely expensive. No mention is made of the fact that many children who have only one febrile seizure would be given a drug they do not require or of the effect this drug would have on cognitive function during this important learning period.

Treatment of infantile spasms and status epilepticus is discussed fully. Ethosuximide is the drug of choice for absence seizures, but there is no mention of tolerance. The recommendation that children with generalised tonic-clonic seizures should stay on treatment for four to five years will not be well received. Those of us fortunate enough to be trained as monotherapists by Lennox (who retired in 1958) have waited patiently for the pendulum to swing back from polypharmacy. It is therefore surprising that the author was able to quote only recent adult references supporting a return to single agents.

I would have liked more basic information about electroencephalograms viz the necessity for immediate and routine electroencephalograms and the type of case which should be investigated by depth electrodes and 24 hour electroencephalograms.

W I FORSYTHE

Epilepsy Guide. Diagnosis and Treatment of Epileptic Seizure Disorders. By E Niedermeyer. Pp 261; £14.95 paperback. Baltimore and Munich: Urban and Schwarzenberg (UK: Pitman Books), 1983.

This guide to the diagnosis and treatment of epilepsy is written by an American physician specialising in epilepsy. Although chiefly concentrating upon adult epilepsy, a large proportion of the book deals with childhood epilepsy. There are some details of advice, with which a paediatrician may differ, in respect of fits in infancy and a bias in favour of the choice of phenytoin as opposed to carbamazepine in the treatment of certain seizure disorders. Nevertheless, the book is clearly written and its light style makes it a pleasure to read. The admirable layout lends itself to easy reference. The main strength of the book is the orientation to practical points in diagnosis and management and the advice is obviously based upon long clinical experience in the art of management of seizure disorders. There is a thorough and up to date review of ideas of classification and what is known of drug metabolism and interaction. The book could be read with profit by any paediatrician dealing with epilepsy and would be a useful addition to both medical and nursing libraries.

R MACFAUL

Textbook of Paediatrics. 3rd ed. Edited by J O Forfar and G C Arneil. Pp 2072 in 2 volumes: £95.00 hardback, £75.00 paperback. Edinburgh, London: Churchill Livingstone, 1984

The first edition of 1973 and the second of 1978 were widely praised, and rightly praised. To produce a comprehensive textbook of paediatrics is a massive task which the editors and contributors fulfilled well. For the new edition almost 100 authors are involved; there is still a preponderance from the Scottish medical schools but the number of authors who work outside the United Kingdom has increased. The opportunity has been taken to correct some omissions of the earlier edition so that this third edition is certainly more comprehensive than its predecessors.

A large textbook needs to be convenient to use for reference and it is unfortunate that the third edition is in some ways less easy to use than its predecessors. The book has become very large with about 2100 pages and this has led to its production in two volumes with all the associated disadvantages. Bearing in mind that the first edition was not all that much shorter and that Nelson's *Textbook of paediatrics* has 1900 well bound pages in a hardbacked

book, it is sad that Forfar and Arneil now appears in two limpbacked volumes. The binding is disappointing and after one trip in my briefcase the outer cover of one volume was dog eared and bent. Those who have had to spend £75 on a textbook of paediatrics want it to remain sturdy and respectable for a decade. Some will consider the extra £20 for the hardbacked version preferable (even though it seems a very large price for satisfactory binding). If the current length means that it has to be published in two volumes then the producers should consider using different paper so that it could appear in one volume, or alternatively, the editors might be advised to produce a slightly shorter book.

A comprehensive textbook needs a super index and unfortunately these two volumes do not have that. Two thousand entries sounds a lot, but it is not enough (Nelson's textbook has twice as many entries and is twice as useful thereby). The usefulness of the index has been impaired by the failure to indicate whether the item is in volume 1 or 2. This could have been done by different type or, alternatively, by having at the top of each index page the inclusive pagination for each volume.

In some ways it is unfair that this very good book will always be compared with Nelson's *Textbook of paediatrics*. Nelson's book has a long heritage and the great advantage of an enormous home market which allows cheap production costs. It manages to come out in a hardbacked edition costing less than £50 which is a remarkable achievement. A British book is unlikely to compete with it in price but can do so in quality, for there are within the United Kingdom paediatric specialists who can write with unequalled skill and clarity.

There are some excellent sections in the book which are authoritative, interesting, and helpful. Each is followed by a bibliography and reference list. For some sections the list is appropriate and most useful but for others it is woefully inadequate or inappropriate. Authors have been allowed to quote too often their own papers, to the exclusion of more authoritative reviews and standard works by others. Moreover, reference to journals which are not readily available in most libraries is not helpful and reference to papers 'in press' without giving a journal name is useless.

Therefore, in some ways the third edition, despite its admirable qualities, does not quite fulfil the promise of its predecessors. This may be because there have been