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 use 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 it 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