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


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 try 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). The current length means that it has to be published in two volumes and 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 and two index entries sounds a lot, but it is not enough (Nelson's textbook has twice as many entries and is twice as useful thereby). This 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, having at the top of each index page, an inclusive pagination for each volume.

In some ways it is unfair that this fine 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. The book manages to come out in a hardbacked edition costing less than £50 which is remarkable achievement. A British book is unlikely to compete with it in price but it can do so in quality, for there are with 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 not 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...
some misjudgements about the production. I hope that the large amount of careful and hard work that has gone into this book will continue and that it will re-emerge in a format that reflects the sturdiness and quality of British paediatrics.

ROY MEADOW

Shorter notices


This well organised collection of 26 papers covers many aspects of the often overlooked subject of nutrition. Although not intended to be comprehensive, the topics cover a wide range from breast feeding to iron metabolism with papers on clinical management, biochemical and physiological studies.


This short, pocket sized text aims to teach the medical student the art of paediatric clinical diagnosis. Beginning with advice on history taking it offers a broad outline of practical methods for the physical examination of children and ends with a useful section on normal values in infants and children.


Forty four contributions to the International Symposium average 6 pages each. A quarter, on education and psychosocial aspects, are mainly discursive and repetitive. Several on epilepsy and psychiatry are valuable with 'Behavioural effects of kindling' by R M Post being particularly interesting. A review of genetics of epilepsy by P Gray and accounts of the place of surgery by Rasmussen and Vaernet confirmed previous lessons. Neurotransmitters, new imaging, and behavioural techniques are not mentioned. A patchy but quite useful book for those particularly interested in the subject who were not there.