Book reviews

Mechanisms of Alcohol Damage in Utero. Ciba Foundation Symposium 105. Pp 296: £26.50 hardback. Pitman, 1984.

This book is the report on the Ciba Foundation Symposium held in London in 1983. The contributors include most of the well known names in the field of fetal alcohol research. The first two sections comprise reports on animal based research using mice, rats, chick embryos, murine neuronal cell cultures, and Macaque monkeys. These reports continue to fuel the controversy around the value of pure bred experimental animals in predicting and explaining the effects of prenatal alcohol exposure in man. The discussions highlight these difficulties. They illustrate the major problems experienced by the pure scientist and the clinician alike in translating their findings into clear advice on the critical time of exposure, the dose-response relation, and why some people are affected and others not.

The third section is devoted to papers on the growth and development of exposed rats and children. Dr Spohr is reassuring about the reported improvement in the psychiatric and cognitive progress of affected children over a four year period. The final section is devoted to the excellent work by Dr Wright and co-workers on moderate alcohol consumption and fetal outcome, and to the more important research on prevention.

To this reviewer the most pleasing aspects of the book are the excellent introductory and closing sections which not only set the content into perspective but also emphasise the need for continuing research. The book summarises well the diverse areas of research that are being pursued at present into how and why alcohol damages the fetus. It does not attempt to answer all the major questions on prevention and dose-response relation but illustrates the problems facing both scientist and clinician.

IAN SMITH

Your Child with Eczema. By D J Atherton. Pp 166: £4.95 paperback. William Heinemann, 1984.

This book is intended as a guide for parents of children with eczema. I have, therefore, asked a lay person experienced in child

care (including children with eczema) to read it, and have incorporated her impressions.

After a brief description of the structure and function of normal skin, the book concentrates on a description of atopic eczema, with particular attention to likely aetiological factors. Half the book is devoted to the practical management of children with eczema, including details of topical applications, avoidance of exacerbating factors, and control of infection. The last part deals with complications and associated diseases, and more general advice on topics such as education and psychological problems in the family.

The section on practical management of eczema is likely to be particularly useful to parents, both by amplifying and explaining their medical management, and by discussing the many relevant environmental factors which a parent otherwise learns by trial and error. For example, the instructions on the use of topical preparations and the application of protective bandages are very clear and well illustrated. Not only parents but also community nurses and doctors would learn much from this whole chapter.

Parts of the detailed discussions on aetiology and corticosteroids are less easy to follow; they may not be understood by a parent who seldom reads. The chapter entitled 'Complications' is misleading, since several of these are associated conditions. The subsection on cataracts which recommends yearly ocular examination may be unduly alarming to the parents of the average child with eczema.

The book is optimistic about the outlook for the child with eczema. It will be a very valuable aid to the inquiring parent and to all involved health workers, and it is well indexed. If guided to the more practical sections most other parents would find it a worthwhile investment.

K S SLOPER

Epilepsy. 100 Elementary Principles. (Major Problems in Neurology, vol 12). By R J Porter. Pp 162: £9.95 hardback. W B Saunders, 1984.

This guide to epilepsy is based on a unique format, a series of 100 concise statements which represent the distillate of Dr Porter's extensive knowledge of this subject. The

principles are not elementary in the sense of meaning simple or introductory, but provide the components of a comprehensive and detailed approach to the total care of a patient with a seizure problem. The first half deals with diagnosis both at an aetiological level, and according to seizure pattern. The accurate recognition of the latter is the key to the correct choice of treatment, and the author skillfully reviews, but does not oversimplify, current seizure classification. He focusses on areas notorious for causing confusion, for example the differentiation of absence attacks from complex partial seizures. He also reminds us that at least 20% of those who fail to respond to anticonvulsants do not have epilepsy.

The second half covers the general aims of anticonvulsant treatment, pharmacology, pharmacokinetics, and selected regimens for partial and generalised seizures. Most of the discussion is relevant to paediatricians practising in the United Kingdom. An American bias is reflected in the secondary role given to sodium valproate. Although there are brief sections dealing with seizure in early infancy, the main emphasis is on older children and adults.

Clinicians struggling to help children whose lives are blighted by refractory epilepsy will be greatly assisted by studying this slim and relatively inexpensive volume. It will incite them to approach seizure diagnosis with renewed enthusiasm, tempered by heightened discipline.

D I JOHNSTON

Perinatal Epidemiology. Edited by M P Bracken. Pp 550: £40.00 hardback. Oxford University Press, 1984.

This book will be of interest to both neonatal paediatricians and obstetricians. It is a collection of reviews, mainly from the western side of the Atlantic, and is divided into two parts. The first reviews a wide range of paediatric and obstetric topics important in perinatal epidemiology—chromosome abnormality, neural tube disorders, prematurity, low birth weight, perinatal mortality, multiple births, congenital viral infections, and sudden infant death syndrome and spontaneous abortion, induced abortion, infertility.

unwanted pregnancy, and hydatidiform mole.

The second part of the book discusses methodological issues in perinatal epidemiology, a section which I found quite revealing. These chapters cover sampling and statistical analysis, the design and conduct of randomised clinical trials related to perinatal research, the assessment of occupational and environmental factors particularly with reference to drug induced congenital malformations, the detection and assessment of neurological dysfunction, and finally critical consideration of the presentation of perinatal mortality rates.

The chapters are clearly written by experts and each is completely up to date. The sections, for instance, on classifying congenital malformations or neurobehavioural dysfunction review fully the many described methods, allowing the reader to discriminate for himself which one is the most useful. This book is a welcome addition to the departmental library.

NEIL MCINTOSH

Microbes and Infections of the gut. Edited by C S Goodwin. Pp 377: £27.50. Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1984.

The realisation that in developing countries diarrhoea is the cause of death of one third of all children who die before 5 years of age has stimulated research into the pathogenesis, treatment, and prevention of gastrointestinal infections. Professor Goodwin has enlisted the help of acknowledged British experts to assist him and his antipodean colleagues in summarising the current state of knowledge in this field.

The opening chapter contains an excellent review of the development of intestinal flora, in which the evidence for a microbial aetiology of necrotising enterocolitis is also examined. Individual chapters are devoted to groups of enteric pathogens including bacteria, viruses, amoebae, protozoa, and helminths. There are also chapters on gut immunology, immunisation, small intestinal overgrowth, and the prevention and

treatment of surgical sepsis after gut surgery. The public health implications of gastroenteritis are covered in two chapters by the editor and Professor Michael Gracey. The book concludes by summarising the evidence implicating the metabolic activities of gut bacteria in the aetiology of colonic cancer which, while interesting, seems out of place.

I particularly enjoyed the chapter on viral infections of the gut in which Dr Flewett writes about an old personal friend, the rotavirus, in fine, 'chatty' style. If, like me, you do not know a *Metagonimus yokogawi* from an *Angiostrongylus costaricensis*, I would strongly recommend the chapter on amoebic dysentery, intestinal protozoa, and helminths by Dr David Grove.

The preface states that this book is recommended to physicians, surgeons, paediatricians, oncologists, microbiologists, and immunologists. While it is true that there is something for all of them, my concern is that there will be insufficient in a book of this size to satisfy any of them. It could prove useful on the bookshelf of a gastroenteritis unit when, for example, a child is admitted with *Plesiomonas shigelloides*. I would also recommend it to anyone embarking on research in this field.

D C A CANDY

Anaerobic Infections in Childhood. By I Brook. Pp 359: £29.75 hardback. G K Hall, 1984.

The author has tried to present in one volume the clinical, microbiological, and therapeutic data necessary for the paediatrician to diagnose and treat anaerobic infections. The book is divided into five sections with 33 chapters. The introductory section deals with the normal anaerobic flora, collection and transportation of samples, the clinical approach to diagnosis, and anaerobes as pathogens. Ten chapters are devoted to neonatal infections and 13 to infections of specific organs. The final chapter on the principles of management is

preceded by a section on miscellaneous infections, which includes tetanus and botulism. There are extensive lists of references after each chapter which amount to some 50 pages.

The book is packed with data and a good perspective is maintained on the relative role of aerobes and anaerobes. Despite its scientific merits, however, I found this book heavy going. I feel it would have benefited from shortening to approximately 250 pages. This could have been achieved if material in the numerous tables had not been duplicated in the text and if certain topics had been amalgamated. Some aspects appear in near identical form in several chapters, for example treatment of neonatal chest infection. Editors of scientific journals insist on economy of words and I believe the reader has every right to expect the same from scientific books.

The division into chapters borders on the idiosyncratic at times. For instance, the establishment of the oral flora is discussed in chapter one, rather than in chapter five on 'Colonisation of the newborn'. These chapters should be read together if one is to understand the subject.

The chapter on treatment supplements the recommendations given at the end of each chapter. Prescribing in the United Kingdom differs from that in America, however, where the Federal Drug Administration does not approve the use of metronidazole in children. This must be remembered when chloramphenicol is suggested for treatment of certain minor infections. The omission of guidelines for antibiotic prophylaxis in bowel surgery is, I believe, a serious one. When does one give the drug, by what route, and how many doses?

The wealth of scientific data and references should commend this book to the few clinicians and microbiologists with a major interest in infection in children, although there are omissions which would disappoint them. Sadly, while supporting the general message, I cannot commend this book to most paediatricians.

R H GEORGE