Book reviews

Ascariasis and its Public Health Significance. Edited by D W T Crompton, M C Nesheim, Z A Pawlowski. Pp 289: £25.00 hardback. Taylor and Francis Limited, 1985.

Ascariasis, affecting roughly 1000 million people in the world, is the commonest human parasite infection. Children bear the brunt of the morbidity and mortality associated with this disease that, as the introduction to this book states, 'ranks high in "the forgotten problems of forgotten people".'

This book records the contributions to an international conference in 1984, which was the first workshop since 1967 devoted entirely to ascariasis. The book is divided into four sections—biology, epidemiology, the disease, and prevention and control. Each section concludes with a discussion that helps to clarify some of the issues. High technology brings the reader face to face with a scanning electronmicrograph of the trifold mouth of a worm, and there is a chapter on mathematical modelling of ascaris populations. This latter chapter serves to illustrate that there is a lack of basic epidemiological data about this disease. Further chapters from three continents emphasise the variability of incidence and morbidity, which should encourage local surveys before embarking on control programmes.

The significance of ascariasis as a cause of malnutrition remains controversial, but the evidence available is clearly presented. Chapters on surgical complications and on allergy are fascinating, but it is the final section about prevention and control to which health planners will turn for guidance. There is an excellent chapter on sanitation. Exhortations to incorporate control of ascariasis within primary health care systems outnumber the few reports of this actually happening. Ascariasis does not have a dramatic appeal to health planners, unlike some other diseases of poverty. The point is well made, however, that worm infestation is a problem easily understood by villagers and may provide a focus for them to work together to improve their own health.

This book is a comprehensive review of a global problem and should be read by those concerned with child health in poorer countries.

DAVID CUNDALL

The Psychology of Childhood Illness. By C Eiser. Pp 212: DM 94 hardback. Springer-Verlag, 1985.

In *The Psychology of Childhood Illness* Christine Eiser reviews the inter-relation between physical illness and the psychological effects on the patient, the parents, and the family unit.

The first half of the book covers general aspects of children's illnesses, their treatment and hospital admissions, and the patient's knowledge and understanding of these events, and their effects on the child and his family. In the second part the author considers specific chronic illnesses (phenylketonuria, diabetes, asthma, and leukaemia) in more detail. Many other chronic conditions, such as congenital malformations and cerebral palsy, are not covered.

The book is written as a review of current literature on the subject, with critical analysis of the various research projects that have been conducted in this field. Personal comment and opinion from the author has been deliberately restricted, and the book might have benefited from an attempt to digest the material presented into a discussion of the current understanding of the subject. The literature review is comprehensive, however, and there are many useful references—indeed, nearly a quarter of the book is devoted to lists of references and indexes.

It is not easy to be sure at whom Christine Eiser is directing this book: it provides an excellent review for psychologists working in paediatric departments, while those who are concerned principally with the medical aspects of children's illness may find the style too disjointed for easy reading. A wealth of valuable knowledge is presented, however, of which paediatricians should be more aware. It is to be hoped that this volume will stimulate more research into this important subject.

N K GRIFFIN

Current Therapy in Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine 1985-1986. Edited by Nelson. Pp 403: £51.50 hardback. Blackwell Scientific, 1985.

This book is a part of the Decker *Current Therapy* series and gives an account of

treatment of many of the diseases seen in the perinatal/neonatal field. The choice of topics is highly personal and ranges from birthing centres to bereavement.

Jeffrey Maisels, writing about hyperbilirubinaemia, states that 'What follows reflects my personal practice. For "practice" do not read "recommendations".' This could probably be said about any chapter in this book. Each topic is discussed, usually, by a single author, so a personal, though expert, opinion of treatment is given. This will inevitably lead to a reader being in disagreement with the writer on occasion, but this serves only to enhance the value of this book.

The first section of the book deals with perinatal problems ranging from breech presentation to toxemia of pregnancy. The selection of topics in this section is an interesting mixture and reflects the editor's 'highly subjective judgement of the general importance of current curiosity inherent to each'. This is no bad thing generally, but paediatricians trying to understand the problems of obstetricians will find the section somewhat limited.

The second section deals with many of the problems faced daily by paediatricians involved in the care of the sick newborn infant. The range of topics is wide, thoughtfully selected, and well written.

Each subject is treated concisely, and the book is refreshingly free from references. It is a ready source of useful information and will be of value to all working in this field of medicine.

GARTH MCCLURE

Common Paediatric Emergencies, A Guide for the GP and Casualty Officer. By R C Groggins and N Higson. Pp 116: £5.50. Wright, 1985.

More children are treated in accident and emergency departments and by general practitioners (GP) than are seen by paediatricians, but many GPs and casualty doctors have had no postgraduate training in paediatrics. Would this book be helpful to such doctors?

The authors (a paediatric senior registrar and a trainee GP) state that the book is intended for casualty officers in a general hospital. GPs seem to be forgotten after the subtitle. Most of the book is about

medical emergencies, but there is a little about trauma. A helpful section on cot deaths shows experience and sensitivity. Much of the text, however, is either too brief to be useful or is irrelevant to doctors in an accident and emergency department. There are many pages about the inpatient management of renal failure and meningitis, but there is nothing about local anaesthesia, minor trauma, or the diagnosis of a cough. There is no mention of drowning or osteomyelitis. The doses of drugs for treating lead encephalopathy are given, but there is no advice on the size of endotracheal tubes or the dose of erythromycin. I was alarmed at the suggestion that exchange transfusion might be needed in nitrazepam or barbiturate poisoning.

Paediatric experience is useful in an accident and emergency department, but training in such a department would also benefit paediatricians. Better books on

paediatric emergencies are available, and this book will not be joining them in my accident and emergency department's library.

R N ILLINGWORTH

Abdominal pain in children. By B O'Donnell. Pp 138: £8.50 paperback. Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1985.

This short book is divided into two main sections, acute abdominal pain, which makes up the first 60 pages in 11 short chapters, and recurrent abdominal pain, which is covered in a further 10 chapters. The author has drawn widely from his large experience in dealing with these two worrying problems. He offers a sensible approach in dealing with the consultation, history, and physical examination. While the importance of acute appendicitis is

dealt with fully, the author is at pains to emphasise that acute non-specific abdominal pain makes up a large part of surgical practice, and the importance of a conservative approach is emphasised. There is a short, but useful, section on acute abdominal pain in the tropics and subtropics. Recurrent abdominal pain is sensibly dealt with; the author, like most of us, has been brought up with the teachings of the late John Apley.

This book is written by someone who clearly is a great clinical teacher and who has a good sense of humour, which is not often found in medical writing. It should certainly be read by all paediatric senior house officers and surgical registrars, and I am sure that, as the author has intended, many general practitioners will find it a useful book as well.

V MILLER