

Book reviews

Advances in Pediatrics, Volume 33. Edited by LA Barness. Pp 415: £48.00 hardback. Year Book Medical Publishers Inc, 1986.

This book covers a series of diverse topics in which the editors feel there have been rapid changes in clinical and scientific areas of paediatrics. The result is 15 chapters of varying length, quality, and intensity ranging from the more esoteric 'dietary influences on neurotransmission' to the more down to earth 'α fetoprotein screening'. The chapters vary in their usefulness to the practicing paediatrician, necessarily having a North American bent, and on the whole do not yield easy answers to immediate practical questions.

Some chapters—for example those on cystinosis and chlamydial infections—are each a tour de force on the subject, and give historical reviews as well as full updates. There is a useful chapter on 'human teratogenicity' with balanced comment on the interpretative difficulties of animal studies, lists of established teratogens, and reference to up to date sources of information. The chapter on imaging procedures, by comparison, is low key with scant mention of the importance of antenatal ultrasound to paediatric practice, and no mention of the major advances in cardiac ultrasound. Other areas covered include 'vitamin E in neonatology', 'epilepsy and education', and 'inherited metabolic disease in the newborn'.

I am not convinced that the editors succeed in their aim to give us 'a refresher course in excitement'. They do, however, provide a useful book that deserves a place on our shelves to dip in to or for reference, but it is not light reading.

C S NELSON

From Birth to Five. A Study of the Health and Behaviour of Britain's Five Year Olds. Edited by NR Butler and J Golding. Pp 439: £24.95/\$37.50 hardback, £14.95/\$22.59 softback. Pergamon Press, 1986.

This impressive book distils the data obtained from a study of a national birth cohort. Many of the common childhood ailments and behaviour problems are included, with the addition of important chapters about the uptake and use of

preventive health services. Sources of possible bias in the data collection are fully discussed and most results are illustrated by bar charts. Associations between variables are clarified by a statistical technique, indirect standardisation, and expressed in terms of relative risk. Each chapter is a model of clarity and ends with a succinct summary of the conclusions.

This is not a dry statistical exercise; if the authors find conclusions distressing or disturbing, they tell us so. Those seeking ammunition with which to continue the assault on social inequalities in health will find more than enough here, but with clear guidance as to the reliability of each conclusion. For example, once the data were standardised for maternal smoking and ethnic group, the association between low birth weight and social class disappeared. Regional variations are explored: can it be that babies in the south east of England cried more, when they were in most respects more privileged than their peers in the rest of the country? Behaviour is in the eye of the beholder, a point not avoided by the authors.

The only criticism is that most of the children studied were leaving school by the time the book was published, and some will by now be starting their own families. Although we are a decade adrift, the book is an invaluable reference for anyone concerned with the health of British children. The editors and their team have produced a cohesive and comprehensive work which is a tribute not only to them, but to the health visitors and mothers who made it possible.

D B CUNDALL

Investigating Hearing in Children. By L Fisch. Pp 273: £27.50 hardback. Croom Helm Ltd, 1987.

Investigating Hearing in Children is a readable book with an emphasis on the practical aspects of assessment. The author describes techniques suited to testing the hearing of children of all ages and gives advice on the construction of premises suitable for this purpose.

Dr Fisch's sympathetic understanding of young children is very evident in the techniques he describes in great detail in

his book. I well remember visiting his assessment clinic some years ago and being impressed by his kindly approach to the children. He describes the physics of sound and hearing in an easily understandable manner.

Some of the techniques which have obviously served Dr Fisch well over the years have not worked too well for me personally. I have not, for example, been very successful in testing hearing for speech at six metres; I felt that I had often dropped out of the child's world at that distance. Dr Fisch's relative scepticism for complicated electronic gadgetry—the auditory response cradle, BSER, and more recently ECochG—is a breath of fresh air. He obviously feels that we have not reached the stage where a machine can be considered to be more reliable than painstaking careful observation of behavioural responses to a range of sound stimuli. He regards results of electronic tests as supportive or otherwise of more simple test results, but certainly not as infallible. I would recommend this book to community health doctors, general practitioners and paediatricians.

M YATES

Atlas of Fetal Sectional Anatomy With Ultrasound and Magnetic Resonance Imaging. By G Isaacson, MC Mintz, ES Crelin. Pp 184: DM 228 hardback. Springer Verlag, 1986.

The aim of this book is to provide anatomical references for ultrasound and nuclear magnetic resonance images of the fetus. This is achieved by placing photographs of gross anatomical sections alongside ultrasound images obtained from the fetus in utero and nuclear magnetic resonance images obtained on aborted fetuses. For each anatomical section there is also a detailed labelled diagram provided. The head, neck, thorax, and abdomen are shown in various sagittal, coronal, and axial sections, and there are separate chapters dealing with the limbs, the brain, and the heart. The majority of the scans feature 20 week fetus, but some show 24 week, 28 week, 34 week, and 38 week fetuses. The quality of the photographed anatomical sections is very good and the accompanying