Book reviews

Euthanasia and the Newborn. Conflicts Regarding Saving Lives (Series: Philosophy and Medicine 24). Edited by R C McMillan, H T Engelhardt Jr., S F Spicker. Pp 313: US \$39.50, £42.75 hardback. D Reidel Pub Co, 1987.

Initially I intended just to 'dip' into the book but the comprehensive lengthy introduction aroused my curiosity to learn more about what the lawyers, ethicists, geneticists, historians, philosophers, theologians, and practicing physicians had to say about this most emotive subject in paediatrics.

The book starts with a good review of the religious origins of the sanctity of life. It takes us from pagan times through Judeo-Christian heritage to the post-Christian era. This is accompanied by an excellent review on religious dilemmas facing the caring professions in their approach to defective neonates.

Though not relevant to this country, the essays on American state and federal regulations bring home how lucky we are in this country to be spared the cumbersome and bureaucratic regulations which govern parental decision making regarding their defective neonates. In this context everyone should read the Baby Doe controversy.

In the chapters which follow various authors have argued well the case for active euthanasia, taking into consideration the religious, moral, and social issues raised by the topic. Both the financial and psychological implications of aggressive management of deformed babies are discussed in depth, as are the burdens this approach will impose on the family and the society. There is a detailed analysis of harms and benefits promised by different levels of intervention. Arguments have been put forward for both state legislation and ethics committees to oversee active euthanasia. In this country I believe most paediatricians would favour the view put forward by Duff and Campbell. They argue that only caring persons can make caring decisions, with emphasis on a family orientated approach and parents actively involved in decision making with paediatricians providing the professional guidance required.

Though most neonatologists would be familiar with Sinclair's economic evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of

neonatal care, I would recommend it to all paediatricians undertaking intensive care of the new born.

The book has been well edited, each author knowing what has been written by others. The chapters are well coordinated and the references and indexing carefully prepared. Some chapters are heavy going and need to be read more than once.

My main criticism is that for the book to be more relevant in this country, more than one British paediatrician should have been selected. We live in a post-Christian era with a multireligious culturally mixed society. It would have been helpful to have had some information about other religious beliefs. For a practicing paediatrician faced with a defective neonate of Moslem or Hindu parentage, this book would give no guidance. Perhaps this could be incorporated in any further symposia organised on this subject.

I recommend this book to all concerned with the management of defective neonates including paediatricians, family physicians, midwives, and social workers. It will certainly generate a lively debate on this most emotive issue.

S K M JIVANI

A Neonatal Vade-Mecum. Edited by P J Fleming, B D Spiedel, and P M Dunn. Pp 344: £13.50 paperback. Lloyd-Luke (Medical Books Ltd), 1986.

This book is a practical guide to neonatal care aimed at senior house officers. The first quarter of it deals with 'perinatal' matters, like the high risk pregnancy, delivery room care, birth trauma, care of the normal baby, care of the high risk baby, transport of the sick baby, and congenital abnormality. The middle half of the book is system and disease orientated, covering all the expected topics including lung disease, heart disease, renal disease, surgical problems, infection, blood disorders, neurological disorders, metabolic disorders, nutrition, and jaundice. The final quarter consists of chapters on broader aspects of neonatal care, such as care of the family (which includes the addresses of self help groups), nursing care, practical procedures, documentation,

and audit, developmental follow-up, drugs and prescribing, ethical issues, and normal laboratory and physiological data.

The amount of information which has been packed into this truly 'pocket sized' book is remarkable, though this does mean that the rate of unloading of information is very high, making the text hard work for anyone completely new to the subject. It is, however, perhaps more a book to 'look things up in' than to read through systematically. The text has ample sub headings, which is a definite aid to comprehension, and the indexing and the quality of diagrams is satisfactory.

As would be expected from the source of this book, there is little of importance to disagree with in either the factual content or the authors' views on management; I would be perfectly happy for my senior house officers to put the recommended practices into action. There are one or two local oddities which would not go down well everywhere, but none of us, alas, is immune from those. I recommend this book wholeheartedly.

P R F DEAR

Children's Hearing Problems: Their Significance, Detection and Management. By Joyce Tweedie. Pp 105: £8.95 paperback. Wright, 1987.

Regrettably hearing problems in children are frequently missed or misunderstood by many doctors, few of whom have had any specialist audiological training. This book was written in an attempt to redress the balance and is particularly directed at those to whom parents often turn for advice. This includes general practitioners, clinical medical officers, and doctors in related fields such as ear, nose, and throat surgery and paediatrics. It would also be useful to other groups of workers, such as speech therapists, health visitors, and teachers. Just under half of the book is devoted to the basic sciences essential to an understanding of audiology. There are simple, clear chapters on anatomy and physiology of hearing, acoustics, and tests of auditory function in children, as well as a section on amplification and the types of hearing aids in current use.