sions with the response to individual need'. Furthermore 'paediatrics leads the way in this kind of patient and family centred approach to medicine. It would be unfortunate if bioethics jeopardised this approach'. This is one good reason why children's doctors should know more about a subject upon which non-medical professional and lay people wax erudite.

I found that the recurring sandwich of comments, parents' and doctors' statements and anecdotes followed by comments to be somewhat tedious. Many of the parents' comments are to be expected. The matters dealt with are very important but the prolix style may deter busy clinicians from reading it unless the importance of the subject drives them to it. It is a brave introduction into a sphere that should become increasingly important in children's medicine.

O P GRAY

Neonatal Seizures. Edited by Claude G Wasterlain and Paul Vert. (Pp 318; \$118 hardback.) Raven Press, 1990. ISBN 0-88167-641-1.

At some stage most paediatricians will have experienced a sinking feeling when faced with a neonate who is apparently having a fit. It is easy simply to prescribe phenobarbitone and perform a battery of (often useless) tests.

However the questions whether the baby is actually having a fit, does the fit need treatment, why is it happening, what do I tell the parents, etc, are less simple. This book attempts to impart a logical view of the diagnosis and management of neonatal seizures. The book itself is the result of an international colloquium on neonatal seizures held in September 1987 and the list of contributors is impressive. The various authors have clearly been given the opportunity to bring their contributions up to date, an important fact in an area as constantly advancing as epilepsy. This is reflected in the references, which include several published in 1989.

The book is divided into five sections: clinical diagnosis, mechanisms of brain damage, cerebral blood flow and metabolism, ontogenesis of receptors and neurotransmitters, and pharmacology and therapeutics. The difficulty of diagnosis of neonatal seizures, particularly with respect to electroclinical correlation, is highlighted and consideration is given to aetiology, prognosis, and the pros and cons of treatment. Chapters are devoted to specific seizure syndromes including neonatal myoclonic encephalopathy and the benign neonatal seizures. The experimental sections are likely to prove heavy going for the non-neurologist and some prior knowledge would help in understanding the important human and animal work presented. However the effort devoted to reading these sections will be well

rewarded. Although the extent to which these mechanisms apply to human seizures is unclear, some knowledge of the potential mechanisms of seizure generation, propagation, and neuronal damage allows a rational approach to the management of neonatal seizures. The final section deals with treatment. The efficacy of the commonly used antiepileptic drugs, difficulties of drug administration in neonates, and the potentially damaging effects of these drugs are discussed. The last chapter recognises the variations in diagnostic and therapeutic attitudes towards neonatal seizures and is devoted to a survey of medical practice in a small number of leading institutions—this may be useful to some of those actively involved in the management of neonatal seizures.

In the end the book raises as many questions as it answers. In attempting to summarise the discussion from an international meeting this book compresses a large amount of information into a relatively small space occasionally leaving the reader feeling somewhat 'shell shocked'. However it addresses an important and poorly understood area and will be of interest to neonatologists, paediatric neurologists, and indeed to those treating epilepsy in children of any age. I would recommend having it on your shelf.

CHRISTOPHER D C RITTEY
Senior registrar in paediatric neurology