

who will be useful to him. Not to be confused with FRIENDS'.

Whether you want to write for fun, for money, or even to impress editors of learned scientific journals, Albert's guide is a must. After all, if it results in just one acceptance it must be worth it—and its cost is probably tax deductible.

HARVEY MARCOVITCH
Consultant paediatrician

Significant Harm. Edited by Margaret Adcock, Richard White, and Anne Hollows. (Pp 155; £9.00 paperback.) Significant Publications, 1991. ISBN 0-9518761-0-4.

One of Wittgenstein's aphorisms (indeed, to be honest, the only one I can ever remember!) goes 'The meaning of a word is the way it is used'. This is particularly apposite in relation to the 1989 Children Act. The act stipulates that before certain action to protect children can be taken, the court must be satisfied on certain specific issues that appear in a checklist. Is the child suffering or likely to suffer harm if action is not taken? Is the child's health or development impaired? If the child has suffered harm, is it significant? Is the harm attributable to care given or likely to be given? How does the child's health and development compare with what could reasonably be expected of a similar child? Is the care given or likely to be given at a level that 'it would be reasonable to expect a parent to give'?

Now clearly all these terms require definition, and are likely to be interpreted in different ways. How bad does harm have to be before it is 'significant'? How likely is 'likely'—does this have to be a 30% chance or a 70% chance? What does one mean by 'a similar child'? Does this mean a child with the same IQ and temperament or a child from a similar social class background? Do 'reasonable parents' beat their children, at times quite hard? Should one take ethnic status into account when making this judgment?

These matters of definition are already being tested in courts up and down the land. To help practitioners, paediatricians, psychiatrists, social workers, and others in their thinking on these matters, a group of experts drawn from the social work, medical, and legal professions who are involved in the preparation of training material before the act was implemented, have produced this manageably sized publication. I found it very helpful. Paediatricians are likely to find Margaret Lynch's chapter 'Significant harm: a paediatrician's contribution' particularly useful, but they will also find interesting Annie Lau's chapter on cultural and ethnic perceptions of the act and Arnon Bentovim's section that puts significant harm in a developmental and family context.

Most of us are likely to find ourselves in court giving evidence on these matters at some time. Anyone who wishes to reduce their adrenalin level by preparing for hostile questioning would do well to have consulted this book the evening beforehand.

PHILIP J GRAHAM
Professor of child psychiatry

Current Paediatric Practice. Edited by Peter Procopis and Geoff Kewley. (Pp 320; £25 paperback.) W B Saunders Company, 1991. ISBN 0-7295-0397-6.

Current Paediatric Practice is a compilation of

almost 100 short and easily read reviews which have been collected over the last 10 years from *Clinical Bulletins* published in the Medical Journal of Australia and Australian Family Physician. The editors have brought together the contributions from a group of physicians and surgeons working at The Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children, Camperdown, Australia into a volume which spans the major areas of clinical paediatric practice.

The reviews, which vary in length from two to nine pages, are clearly laid out and are illustrated in black and white. The text is aimed at a wide audience and would interest paediatricians working for their MRCP, nurses who have an interest in paediatrics, and general practitioners looking for an easy to read review. The standard of the individual reviews is variable and as some were written up to 10 years ago their content is not always right up to date. Only a half of the reviews are referenced and in some areas such as haematology and endocrinology there is incomplete coverage of a number of common paediatric problems.

The reviews generally reflect the personal experience and practice of the reviewer and thus opinions may at times differ between the reader and reviewer about how to manage a particular problem. Although I have little disagreement with the accuracy of most of the reviews, I have difficulty in recommending either dilute carbonated drink or fruit cordial in the treatment of acute diarrhoea.

The reader should not expect state of the art clinical paediatrics in this book, more a chatty informal tutorial on a broad spectrum of paediatric problems.

W MICHAEL BISSET
Lecturer in child health

Lecture Notes on Paediatrics. 6th Ed. By S R Meadow and R W Smithells. (Pp 259; £12.95 paperback.) Blackwell Scientific Publications Ltd, 1991. ISBN 0-632-03113-1.

This paperback has recently undergone its sixth revision in 18 years reflecting the rapid growth and maturation of paediatrics as a specialty; the authors are to be congratulated on their efforts to keep it up to date. It is designed primarily for use by medical students and paediatric nursing staff, though junior paediatricians may find it of use.

Does it continue to be good enough to persuade the near destitute student to part with the meagre resource of his or her grant? The short answer is 'yes'. Although (as a Nottingham graduate raised on *Essential Paediatrics* by D Hull and D Johnston) the text was unfamiliar to me, I found it neatly laid out and sympathetically written. The first two chapters provide an excellent overview of child health and the third offers some sensitive advice and useful tips on how to examine children and escape with eardrums intact. Although the chapter on the newborn is clear and brief, I wonder whether, with the rapid expansion of neonatology as a specialty within paediatrics, it should be included in a text of this kind, particularly as there are several good concise neonatal handbooks available. The main factual content is covered in chapters dealing with problems by system, with information given in note form in short paragraphs. These have been updated and are well balanced.

There are some minor flaws. I was astonished that a picture of a child with hypothyroidism was titled simply 'A cretin' particularly as earlier chapters had stressed the merit of

avoiding this way of referring to children. In addition, I feel that basic paediatric texts should draw attention to the existence of areas of controversy even though a full discussion may not be appropriate. The reader may otherwise fail to identify areas where controversy exists. An example of this is that many paediatricians would not embrace the concept espoused in this book of mandatory lumbar puncture in meningitis, and would consider the presence of papilloedema to be a clear contraindication.

In general then, a good first paediatric text book which is, by comparison with other medical texts, excellent value for money.

IAN MECROW
Senior paediatric registrar

Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology. Edited by Sue Carpenter and John Rock. (Pp 493; Price \$86.50 hardback.) Raven Press, 1992. ISBN 0-88167-839-2.

Some aspects of American medical practice and language do not translate well to this side of the Atlantic, and this book unfortunately provides numerous examples of such differences, which will inevitably reduce its appropriateness for the British bookshelf.

There is an irritatingly wide spectrum of styles in the book, with each chapter having different authors, and it is difficult to detect what readership the editors were intending to address. Some chapters are written at a very simplistic level appropriate for GCSE biology students, such as those on the menstrual cycle and on dysmenorrhoea (the latter with a remarkably enthusiastic recommendation for treatment with TENS, transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation, more normally found in the north London National Childbirth Trust class than the teenage classroom!), while others are overloaded with heavyweight science and rarities, such as the 21 page chapter on 'Hirsutism in the Pediatric Patient' (with 179 references!).

There is considerable overlap and repetition (often mutually contradictory) between the chapters, which are frequently longwinded, such that one is not surprised to read the advice that it is necessary 'to allot one full hour' for the examination of a paediatric patient.

A particular difficulty for the British reader is the description in several early chapters of elaborate and intrusive techniques for the gynaecological examination of young girls, which are not practised in this country on adult women, let alone children. The use of the colposcope is advocated for routine examinations. The knee-chest position is described as ideal, with the alternative of labial traction to augment the supine position, neither of which are used in the United Kingdom. Data on transhymenal diameters are quoted religiously, although the wide normal ranges given serve to demonstrate why this isolated parameter is held, in this country, as being of limited use in the diagnosis of child sexual abuse. Perhaps, therefore, the most fortunate example of inconsistencies in content of different chapters is the much more measured view of the appropriate assessment of possible victims of child sexual abuse given in a later chapter. The last chapter, on the difficult topic of the gynaecological care of mentally handicapped children, is a notable inclusion.

On reflection, I would see this book as being available for reference in the hospital library, with the comprehensive chapters on vulval disease, vaginal discharge, abnormal