

AUTUMN BOOKS

McCance and Widdowson – A Scientific Partnership of 60 Years. Edited by M Ashwell. (Pp 264; £19.95 hardback.) British Nutrition Foundation, 1993. ISBN 0-907667-07-4.

'Wizard' was a word frequently used by McCance to describe a good idea that appealed to his scientific imagination, and wizard is the word I would use to describe this book. It is a treasure trove of information – biographical, anecdotal, and scientific – about two figures who did so much to establish the scientific basis of paediatrics.

Known best in the paediatric world for their contributions to neonatology and childhood nutrition, there is hardly an area of experimental medicine that Robert McCance and Elsie Widdowson did not turn their hands and minds to. David Southgate writes about the creation of their classic *Chemical Composition of Foods*, Douglas Black outlines their work on mineral metabolism (which included McCance's determined attempts to make himself both salt depleted and alkalotic, that nearly finished him off), John Dickerson writes on body composition (Widdowson's appetite for cutting up dead animals of all kinds, fetuses, stillbirths and corpses: in her 80s she spent three weeks dissecting 20 seals at Washington zoo), Brian Wharton summarises their contributions to neonatal physiology, David Lister to growth, and Roger Whitehead to Third World nutrition.

In a scientific world dominated by genetic engineering and the prospective clinical trial it is wonderful to read accounts of elegantly simple, well designed experiments aimed at answering basic questions. My sketchy ideas concerning growth and body composition in early life have been clarified by reading the two reviews (McCance's Lumleian lectures of 1962, 'Food Growth and Time', and Widdowson's Sanderson-Wells lecture 'Harmony of Growth' of 1970, both published in the *Lancet*) included in the book. They are essential background reading for anyone taking a critical interest in David Barker's programming hypothesis.

The clarity of McCance and Widdowson's writing, passed on to many of their 'pupils' who have contributed essays or reminiscences, makes this colourful hagiography an enormous pleasure to read. Margaret Ashwell has done a great service in putting together such a rich record of two remarkable people who belong to an experimental tradition stretching from Harvey, through Lavoisier and Bernard to the present day. This book is an inspiration to those who wish to keep that tradition alive at a time that it is in danger of being eclipsed by molecular biology and the double blind trial. It conveys the excitement and trials of whole body human and animal research. There remains a place for physiological investigations on small numbers of subjects, and the work of McCance and Widdowson is a reminder of the great value of such an experimental approach.

L T WEAVER
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Food and Food Additive Intolerance in Childhood. Edited by T J David. (Pp 498; £19.95 paperback.) Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1993. ISBN 0-632-03487-4.

For some time I have been in need of a guiding light through the jungle of myths, fantasies, and legends that so often surround the problems of food and food additive intolerances that can affect the health of children. I have now found such a guide in this excellent book.

Its main aim is to examine critically what is known about food and food additive intolerances and to establish their importance to paediatric illness in general. Helped most ably by many acknowledged colleagues in Manchester and outside Professor David has succeeded well in these aims. An enormous number of references have been sifted through to produce this very readable book. All the definitions one would wish to have are given to equip the reader with the basic vocabulary of the subject. There are sections on the common intolerances: cows' milk, soya, egg, and cereal. The problems of various food additive and salicylate intolerances and the clinical role of hypoallergenic milk formulas feature, as also do the poorly understood contributions that food intolerances make to various chronic illnesses in children, especially asthma, atopic eczema, gastrointestinal disorders, and rheumatoid arthritis. Especially helpful are chapters on the investigations needed if dietary intolerance is suspected and the value of elimination diets and drug treatments. The book concludes with a fascinating account of unorthodox investigations and treatments – so aptly described by Professor David as 'adventures into the bizarre'.

There are altogether 18 major chapters divided into 78 sections each following a similar basic plan with important background information, basic and applied scientific details and aspects of diagnosis and treatment all very clearly presented. I found especially valuable at the end of each section a short summary of what had been previously described together with some key references each accompanied by a pithy synopsis. Where there are deficiencies in knowledge these are critically addressed and if the reader wishes to pursue any topic in further detail there is a very comprehensive list of references at the end of each chapter to satisfy this curiosity.

I would warmly recommend this book to all health professionals who have to deal with children. Its value to adult specialists who see children with gastrointestinal complaints, respiratory and dermatological problems should also not be underestimated. I will certainly have this book in my clinic as it will give me the confidence I need to deal with the increasing number of parents I see who, along with many of our professional colleagues, are only too pleased to attribute protean symptoms in their children to dietary intolerances.

D P DAVIES
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The Practice of Medicine in Adolescence. Edited by Charles G D Brook. (Pp 283; £65 hardback.) Edward Arnold, 1993. ISBN 0-34-54850-9.

'Too old for toys, too young for boys, I'm just a little in between.' Thus the doggerel definition heard many years ago for the age group of

individuals considered and more accurately defined in this book. There is increasing interest and concern for the particular medical needs of adolescents. There is extensive literature on adolescent psychiatry, but relatively little on the broader aspects of medical care. This book attempts to cover the subject.

The editor himself writes that editing a multi-author book is a nail biting experience. The book begins with his admirably concise account of physiological changes at puberty. There are then three longish overlapping chapters on psychology and psychiatry and their relation to illness in adolescence, of theoretical rather than practical content.

There is a chapter on genetic conditions, followed by chapters on specific disorders such as cystic fibrosis, which gets a longer account than the much more common asthma. It is curious that in a British book, diabetes is discussed by an American author who recommends pork insulin, expects his patients to test their urine for ketones every morning, and doesn't mention pen devices. There are other chapters on system disorders such as cardiology and renal disease. Here the book's major defect becomes apparent: there is no chapter on neurological disorders.

Under epilepsy in the index is a reference to the interference of anticonvulsants with oral contraceptives, but no discussion about epilepsy in general. There is, however, a chapter on trauma and orthopaedics. There are useful chapters on sexual abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, contraception (not 'too young for boys' nowadays), drug misuse, and eating disorders.

The final chapter discusses clearly the needs of school leavers with physical or mental handicap, though the book does not discuss their needs during their schooldays. School in general receives little attention throughout, though adolescents spend much time there and their various illnesses affect the progress of education.

The authors of this book are based in teaching hospitals. A different perspective on medicine in adolescence would be described by doctors working in a district general hospital. There is a chapter on conversion disorders (headache, abdominal pain, and limb pains), but nothing on glandular fever or the group of quite disabling conditions loosely described as postviral fatigue syndrome that affect a number of individuals in any secondary school. Acne is a scourge for many adolescents but it is barely mentioned, again only because antibiotics taken for the condition might affect the efficacy of contraceptive pills.

For the size of the book, each chapter is followed by a long list of references enabling the diligent reader to pursue the topic further.

In summary: a useful but incomplete account of the practice of medicine in adolescence.

C M GABRIEL
Consultant paediatrician

Recent Advances in Paediatrics 11. Edited by T J David. (Pp 236; £22.50 paperback.) Churchill Livingstone, 1993. ISBN 0-443-04754-7.

Tim David has developed an unerring eye for picking ripe fruit from the tree of knowledge for his loyal readers, and the latest volume in this deservedly popular series offers a wonderful and at times exotic collection. The 11th volume opens with a clearly written and