BOOK REVIEWS


This new publication covers a range of surgical emergencies affecting children and gives some background to the surgical conditions and concentrates on first line management and investigation. It tackles subjects by clinical presentation rather than pathology and is aimed at the non-paediatric surgical specialty trainee, casualty, and nursing staff. It covers a wide range of presenting symp- toms, though by nature of the book, many rather superficially.

This topic has been poorly covered by recent texts, the majority of which have been major in-depth texts, unsuitable for quick reference by non-specialist staff. It is well laid out with short paragraphs, an easily readable concise style, bullet lists, and subheadings.

It is a shame that in the first chapter on emergency surgical admission, there is no stress on basic resuscitation, neither do APLS (ATLS) techniques appear here nor as a preface to a general trauma section. The illustrations are well chosen and helpful, though a few more examples of practical procedures would be useful, such as suprapubic aspiration and reduction of hernia. It would also be useful to have covered the role of the regional and suprapleural specialist unit and transfer of the sick child, in particular neonates. The authors have set out to cover a large subject in an easily accessible format. The cost of this to some extent has been to lose any impression of the multiple controversies that exist within paediatric surgery. In picking a simple treatment plan, there are management suggestions that would not be acceptable in other centres in the UK, for example, that it is ever preferable to perform a pyloromyotomy under local anaesthesia or that it should ever, with careful management of the underlying electrolyte including potassium deficiency, be impossible to correct the electrolyte imbalance.

In general I feel the book is well written, well presented, with good illustrations. It will form a much needed up-to-date source of reference for medical students, nursing staff, and junior hospital doctors in the non-specialist environment.

ROWENA HITCHCOCK
Senior registrar in paediatric surgery


As a newly appointed consultant, I was per-plexed and challenged by Scott, a severely handicapped little boy who would be brought into the consultation room and promptly have a seizure on staring at the tartan squares on the carpet. If his mother could distract him from the carpet, his gaze would seek the linear patterns in the curtains, or worst still my striped blouse, and further absence attacks would occur. Neither the books nor my more erudite colleagues could help much but his mother was convinced that he was sensitive to patterns.

The new edition of Photosensitive Epilepsy sheds much light on the phenomenon of pattern sensitivity and tells us far more besides about photosensitive epilepsy. The text is based on the authors' study of the largest cohort of photosensitive patients ever achieved (now over a 30 year period) and details new diagnostic techniques, prognosis, and genetic implications of the condition.

The authors strongly recommend education to correct EEG technique is essential to demonstrate photosensitivity reliably. A photoconvulsive response is often familial, is twice as common in females, and presents typically around puberty (although the history often suggests it may have been present for some years before it is recognised). Long term follow up studies indicate that a quarter of patients will achieve remission.

In western Europe the commonest precipit-ant of photosensitive epilepsy is television viewing (due to AC mains supply which alternates at 50 Hz). In 1993, 'videogame' epilepsy was given much footage in the European press as increasing numbers of seizures were reported in children who watched videos. Most video monitors are 70 Hz (and thus likely to be outside the photosensitivity range) and many children seized as a result of playing with hand held modules or in game arcades. Thus, there was an additional factor other than simple photosensitivity. The authors were in the vanguard of opinion that this was likely to be pattern sensitivity and they discuss their evidence for this.

The fascinating subject of self induced photosensitive epilepsy is considered in which children have a compulsive attraction for TV (sometimes being drawn across a road to watch TV in shop windows). If they can get close enough to the set, they will have a seizure. Self induced pattern epilepsy is much rarer and is usually found in children with learning disability.

There is a chapter on treatment and, although avoidance of stimuli is still recom- mended, there has been a change of view regarding drug treatment. It is now recom- mended that all young people with primary photosensitive epilepsy are treated with sodium valproate because of the increasing exposure to provocative visual stimuli in modern day life. The book contains a large number of useful and fascinating facts, including pattern testing techniques and the stringent testing techniques applied to pilots, divers, and train drivers.

I would consider the book essential reading for all doctors who treat patients with photosensitive epilepsy.

GAYNOR F COLE
Consultant paediatric neurologist


'When I was a boy: World a better spot What was so was so: What was not was not'

There are different approaches to the problem of keeping up to date. The least effective is that of the ostrich, stick your head in the sand.