looked pretty normal to me – before I read the legend which confirmed it was!

At the beginning of each chapter, there is a useful glossary of medical terms and a summary of the clinical objectives of examining each system. At the end there is a comprehensive list of questions on the chapter and a largely American bibliography.

It is, of course, a very American book. Its emphasis on health assessment rather than on illness detection is a development from the health check so popular in America. The use of the word client instead of 'patient' or 'subject' reminds us of the different commercial relationship between patients and their doctors in America. However, our patients are becoming more consumer orientated and the next generation of doctors and other medical workers may well regard them as 'clients'.

The chapters on child development, breast examination and the sections on changes found in the elderly are excellent. These are often areas not covered by general books on the subject, as are sex problems, which are discussed in the sections on male and female genito-urinary systems. They are preceded by the warning that anyone posing questions on sex should be prepared to follow through with intervention skills in this area. Interestingly, the male section gives 17 questions on sex problems compared with 8 in the womens' section. Perhaps this reflects the bias of the authors – who are female American nurses! My pocket books were written by eminent physicians, and there appears to be no 'physician' input into this book.

This might explain one or two omissions that I noticed. For instance, in a clear diagram of referred pain from abdominal organs there is no mention of shoulder-tip pain from the gall bladder. Likewise, in their neurological section they cover the cranial nerves very well, but their assessment of the peripheral nervous system does not refer to individual nerves, which I feel weakens this chapter.

But these criticisms are minor. Overall, the book is an excellent tutor on clinical history and examination for all students of health and illness. The main book will not fit into a white-coat pocket, but it comes with a 60-page synopsis that will. If it had been about when I was a student I would have bought it. Today it makes a useful reference book.

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Contemporary Neurology, edited by M.J.G. Harrison. Pp. xiii + 641, illustrated. Butterworths, London, Boston, Durban, Singapore, Sydney, Toronto, Wellington, 1984. £25.00.

This book is surprisingly expensive at £25. It is fat, containing over 600 pages, but a paperback, and much of the contents has previously appeared as commissioned articles in the *British Journal of Hospital Medicine* between 1974 and early 1983. Although the Editor has grouped articles together appropriately, there is no coherent theme running through the book, nor can it be considered in any way a textbook of neurology. For example, the four articles on multiple sclerosis include one on acute optic neuritis, one on immunological aspects, one on new treatments, and one on spinal cord stimulation.

If what one wants to look up happens to be in the book, then almost invariably a careful and complete description of that particular topic is contained. It is, however, a weakness that the date of original publication is not given at the head of each article, though the date of many can be inferred from the list of references.

Despite these criticisms, this book can be considered as a useful revision source for those undertaking the examination for Membership of the Royal College of Physicians.

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Davidson's Principles and Practice of Medicine: a Textbook for Students and Doctors, Fourteenth edition, edited by John Macleod. Pp. x + 843, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1984. £19.50.

It is difficult for medical students, GPs and post-graduates to choose from the large number of general medical books now available. The only sensible advice is to find the most suitable one by borrowing each in turn from the library. The choice really lies between a very concise text book that is portable, preferably fitting into a white coat pocket or a large book which is exhaustive and tries to deal with every query. There is enough information to pass finals and probably MRCP in the condensed text providing every word is read and understood. The major problem with these books is that explanation is cut to a minimum and they are less likely to satisfy the student who does not