MCQs in Geriatric Medicine, Rose Anne Kenny. Pp. iii + 189. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1985. £6.50.

I belong to a generation whose competence in medicine was tested by the ability to write essays in response to questions which began with the words 'discuss' or 'compare' or 'describe'. I have never ceased to marvel at the ingenuity of the modern generation of examiners who devise tests of knowledge based on determining whether a statement is true or false. Faced with such questions I am tempted to answer 'a bit of each'; but the wretched computer whose marking skills dominate modern examinations rejects by answer.

Dr Kenny, a Clinical Registrar at Hammersmith Hospital, has managed to find 1500 statements about geriatric medicine which are true or false and has set them out most admirably and systematically. Her publishers have provided a most attractive format, with the answers printed on the following page and references given in support. Her little book contains a vast amount of information which is made highly accessible to those preparing for examinations. The art of the compiler is in teasing, by inserting the false answer that is just plausible. In this too much ingenuity is displayed and I fell into many tantalising traps. No one would pretend that all the skills required to become a competent physician in geriatric medicine can be tested in this way; but it is a pleasure to express my admiration of the skill with which so much of the factual base of the specialty has been condensed in this book, and how effectively one's own knowledge can be tested by working through it.

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Progress in Surgery. Volume 1, edited by I. Taylor. Pp. ix + 225, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1985. £14.00.

From the publishers of *Recent Advances in Surgery* this book is a multi-author selection of personal reviews of controversial topics aimed principally at trainee surgeons approaching Final Fellowship. A wide range of subjects is covered. Presentation of each is clear and easy to follow. The value of different treatment strategies and the rationale behind them is examined with reference to recent data and the author's own clinical practice.

The first essay alone 'Surgery on Trial' is a valuable comment on 'normal' surgical practice, randomisation and the necessity for informed comment, and forms an excellent introduction to the rest of the material in the book.

In summary, the final impression is of a number of well presented scrupulously prepared tutorials, which will be welcomed by the intended audience and many others who wish for up-to-date reviews of current practice in fields other than their own.

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Research: How to Plan, Speak and Write About It, edited by Clifford Hawkins and Marco Sorgi. Pp. xi + 184, illustrated. Springer-Verlag, Berlin, Heidelberg, New York, Tokyo, 1985. £8.75 approx.

Medical training concentrates upon the recognition of disease and effective communication with the patients. It is concerned therefore with the application of the results obtained in research rather than the process of discovery itself.

The physician entering research is therefore at a disadvantage compared with colleagues who have had a similar period of training in a conventional science. This little book is intended to fill the real need of physicians starting research. While research itself cannot be taught, many pitfalls can be avoided by instruction in the practical steps everyone must go through in setting up a research programme, its planning, analysis of results and their communication to others. This book has useful advice in all these areas.

The chapters concerned with communication are better than those with planning and a great deal of useful advice is given. It is unfortunate that more space was not given to a discussion of the problem concerned with planning research since it is here that novices need most help.

The formulation and refining of ideas is important since research is often started without having a very clear idea of the objectives which can be realistically achieved. After this there follows the careful scrutiny and verification of the methods which will be used. Setting up methods can indeed take up a very large part of a prospective research programme. The authors of this book fail to give adequate space in this area. They also fail to mention that the rejection of grants sometimes results from the fact that the applicant has not convinced the authorities that they are capable of conducting the research they propose.

Finally, emphasis should have been made about the all important time factor in entering a new field of research; even the most experienced investigator often fails properly to assess what can be achieved in the time available.

These criticisms apart this book is a useful guide to anyone entering research. It is particularly helpful in regard to the facilities available for bibliographical research, analysis of results and in communication of the results either through talks or scientific publications. It is good value.

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Sir Robert Macintosh's Lumbar Puncture and Spinal Analgesia: Intrathecal and Extradural, Fifth edition, J. Alfred Lee, R.S. Atkinson and Margaret J. Watt. Pp. vii + 335, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1985. £18.00.

Sir Robert Macintosh first produced his classic slim volume on spinal anaesthesia in 1951. He was joined by J. Alfred Lee for the third edition in 1973 and then left the authorship to Dr Lee and Dr R.A. Atkinson for the third edition in 1978. The opportunity was taken at that time to include extradural block. For the fifth edition, Dr Margaret J. Watt has joined the authorship.