Renal and Urologic Emergencies edited by Allan B. Wolfson and Ann Harwood-Nuss, *Clinics in Emergency Medicine*. Vol. 8. Pp xi + 291, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, New York, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, 1986. £28.00.

The authors of this publication address themselves to the diagnosis and management of a wide range of relatively common problems associated with the renal tract. Occasional contributors have attempted to be too comprehensive and have allowed themselves to discuss problems which could hardly be termed 'emergencies'. This is particularly true in the chapter devoted to hypertension, which is often confusing rather than helpful. However, the chapters on infection of the renal tract and that devoted to urological sepsis, are extremely clearly presented and well structured, providing a balanced view relating to the pathophysiology and management of the various problems under discussion.

Although chapters 4 and 5, which examine the problems associated with electrolyte and acid base disorders, might be considered a little lengthy, they nevertheless contain a very carefully argued and clearly expressed physiological basis for the various disturbances discussed, with a logical approach to treatment. However, they both suggest applying 'formulae' for the correction of biochemical disorders: this must be applied with caution by the reader.

Chapter 1 advises on the evaluation of patients with azotaemia and/or oliguria, providing a comprehensive catalogue of causes responsible for this relatively common condition. In discussing the diagnostic approach, it fails, however, to stress the importance of the early exclusion of obstructive uropathies. Likewise, it contains one or two 'throw-away' statements relating to management, which must be viewed with caution. This applies particularly to the use of bicarbonate.

Complications relating to dialysis and transplantation and the early management of retention are also comprehensively covered.

This is an excellent and timely publication, based on a sound pathophysiological approach to the diagnosis and management of many renal disorders. Although it is styled in some respects to meet the needs of emergency medicine as practised in North America, this does not detract from its value to both general physicians and/or trainee nephrologists who are exposed to decision making in the diagnosis and acute management of patients with major disturbances of renal function in the United Kingdom.

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Respiratory Function in Speech and Song, Thomas J. Hixon and collaborators. Pp. xiii + 434, illustrated. Taylor & Francis, London, 1987. £27.00.

This book, which is actually composed of a series of articles previously published between 1973 and 1986, is not for the casual browser. It is a very specialised and doubtless erudite compilation, devised and aimed at that new transatlantic

breed of 'speech pathologists' but with very limited appeal to the general otolaryngologist or speech therapist. This is, nevertheless, a comprehensive and detailed account of all components of respiratory function in voice production. The physiological dynamic interplay of thorax and abdomen is extensively discussed and some interesting methods of measuring laryngeal resistance, albeit of research rather than practical application, are described.

A large part of the book is concerned with 'kinematics' – a method of assessment which treats the chest wall as a two-part system consisting of rib cage and abdomen and uses diameter changes to estimate directly the volume displaced by individual parts, using magnetometers (electro-magnetic coil pairs). The final chapters are the most interesting to the clinician, describing the application of these research techniques to disease states such as motor neurone disease and respiratory paralysis and may contribute to the understanding and management of professional vocalists such as opera singers and actors or patients with speech breathing disorders. In particular a distinct difference is demonstrated between resting tidal breathing and that related to speech production so that control of breathing activity during speech cannot be inferred from studies of automatic respiration. However, the total of this book is less than a sum of its parts as it lacks cohesion and ultimately begs the question, for whom is it intended?

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What is Epilepsy? The Clinical and Scientific Basis of Epilepsy, edited by M.R. Trimble and E.H. Reynolds, Pp. x + 350, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1986. £40.00.

This book derives from a workshop held in July 1985 attended by clinicians and basic scientists who were asked to review the present state of knowledge in their particular field and discuss its relationship to the larger, central question 'what is epilepsy?'. The 1980s has seen a spate of books on epilepsy and there is a danger of the market becoming saturated in the near future. Does this addition, therefore, offer anything not found in these other volumes? The answer to this question is definitely 'yes'. For the clinician sitting in the consulting room the question posed by the books' title is often to the fore of one's mind, and many of the clinically related chapters make interesting reading. The vexed question of the relevance of the electroencephalogram to the clinical diagnosis is also discussed in several chapters. Various aspects of the basic science aspects of epilepsy are dealt with in subsequent chapters.

Undoubtedly for this reviewer the most interesting part of the book is its final forty pages. Here is to be found the verbatim report of two general discussions which, as one of the editors states was the 'most important session of the whole workshop'. In the first discussion the question 'what is epilepsy?' is dealt with both from a purely semantic viewpoint as well as how our scientific understanding of epilepsy relates