including acute and chronic pain, sympathetic pain, neuropathic pain and opioid-responsive and non-responsive pain in cancer. Finally, the role of pain clinics and pain clinic treatments is discussed.

The clinical control of pain is still far from satisfactory. Some treatments, such as intravenous regional sympathetic blocks, and physiotherapy, although used for many years in the management of sympathetic pain, have never been subjected to controlled evaluation, and it is evident that the basic science and therapeutic practice are not advancing in parallel in that clinical area. The editors have permitted some measure of disagreement between their authors. For example, in one chapter the authors claim that there is little evidence to support acupuncture as an effective remedy, while in another the authors believe that there is 'an inherent analgesic action, which may be due to A delta fibre stimulation'. Such conflict and controversy is healthy, however, and the critical reader will enjoy this opportunity of keeping abreast with the cutting edge of basic and clinical research in this very important area of medical practice.

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Recent Advances in Epilepsy 5, edited by T.A. Pedley and B.S. Meldrum. Pp. 243, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, London, Tokyo, New York, Madrid, Edinburgh, Melbourne, 1992. Hardback £34.95.

This edition aims to provide an authoritative review on a wide range of topics in the field of epilepsy. There are concise and readable reviews for the specialist in epilepsy rather than for a general physician or a psychiatrist. The most interesting to me was the chapter on behavioural therapy of epilepsy, describing the seizure control by altering the attitude and behaviour of the epileptic patient. A good summary, but in three chapters on the new antiepileptic drugs Vigabatrin, Lamotrigine and Gabapentin. An interesting dimension to this book has been an inclusion of a chapter on management of epilepsy in developing countries as it differs markedly from that in developed countries.

The highlight, in my opinion, of the book is a chapter on management of concurrent medical and psychiatric disorders. A large part of the book is devoted to the fundamental mechanisms, pathophysiology and diagnosis of epilepsy.

Not knowing the price of this hardback volume, it would be an essential book for the library and the specialist (epilepsy clinics). The general physician and the psychiatrists need to browse through.

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Annual Review of Public Health, edited by G.S. Omenn. Pp. x + 552. Annual Reviews, Palo Alto, California, 1992. Hardback £27.00.

Health Gain: these two short words permeate and dominate every aspect of the practice of public health medicine in the UK. I therefore approached the annual review of the American practice of the specialty with great interest: are they as wrapped up in the issue? The short answer is 'Yes'; though individual programmes may differ, the essential thrust is the same as on this side of the Pond.

The aim of the volume is given as bridging academic and service based public health and preventive medicine. In addressing this, it is divided into six sections: epidemiology and biostatistics, environmental and occupational health, public health practice, behavioural aspects of health, health services and the public health of ageing.

The aim is clearly met and with success. The book opens with a clear, detailed and weighty review of HIV and AIDS in children and the approach taken sets the tone for the whole book. A central feature of annual reviews is that they must assume each reader will wish to read all topics covered but will not have an in-depth knowledge of every one. As with the rest of the book, this opening section builds up its topic clearly and methodically, starting from the general and moving into more specialist areas.

Of the remainder of the book, I particularly enjoyed three sections. First, the section on the evaluation of health promotion programs discusses the concept of 'black boxes', arguing cogently for opening them. 'Black boxes' embody the notion that purchasers of health and health care programmes do not need to know what goes on in them, merely that the outcomes are successful and at competitive prices. This discussion is an increasingly important feature of negotiations between purchasers and providers in the NHS. I would recommend the book for this chapter alone. I also liked the section on 'public health assessment', a practical vade mecum on the hard indicators that can be used in each major group and how to deal with small areas and small populations. I would strongly recommend this discussion to anyone serious about needs assessment and health gain. Finally, the chapter on 'social marketing' – the concept of bringing the principles of commercial marketing to the management of health changes in society – was fascinating for its directness and businesslike approach, arguing for health professionals to get in there with the media manipulators.

The great value of this book is that it is above all interesting. So many annual reviews are rather dry, telling the reader perhaps more about the authors and their research programmes than the subjects covered. This review picks key areas of mainstream interest to anyone involved in public health; it then sets out the major ideas early in each section and argues them through with increasing complexity such that I suggest any reader will find the discussion valuable.

The editors preface the work by saying that this year's layout and approach is something of an experiment. The experiment was an undoubted success and should be repeated. I strongly recommend anyone working in public health to read it.

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