Book Reviews

Basic Skills in Clinical Medicine: A Guide to Ward Procedures for Students and House Officers, Second Edition, (First Edition published as *Basic Skills for Surgical Housemen*), Kenneth C. Calman and Christopher D. Hanning. Pp.vi + 155, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne and New York, 1983. £4.95.

The authors have updated and expanded their first edition and the resultant book now covers all the practical procedures likely to be performed in the wards or minor operating theatres of British hospitals. Having originated as 'Basic Skills for Surgical Housemen', there are sections on ward organisation, preparation of patients for operation and post-operative pain control. It is unusual in a textbook for doctors to find descriptions of technique of giving injections and of passage of a bladder catheter in the female. Venepuncture, setting up of drips and central venous cannulation are described in great detail and these chapters are very useful. The afterthoughts on parenteral nutrition and pulmonary artery catheterisation however, are too brief to be of much use. Similarly, the brief paragraph on peritoneal dialysis is of very limited use and surely, retrograde catheterisation of the ureters and haemodialysis are not exactly 'basic' skills; certainly, they would not normally be performed by the students and house officers, for whom the book is intended. My first major anxiety is the diagram on page 95, of how to perform a liver biopsy. The subcostal route is widely regarded as a recipe for disaster and the illustration of technique would almost certainly result in damage to the gall-bladder. The section on maintenance of the airway and respiratory support is helpful, but again, bronchoscopy, both rigid and fibre optic, seem outside the normal remit of junior medical staff. The next sections on management of cardiac arrest, pleural and pericardial drainage and lumbar puncture are all helpful. While it is then helpful to have information on marrow aspiration, I question the wisdom of including the cell separator in the same section. The book concludes with sensible chapter on preparation for the various contrast radiological procedures.

This book tries to accomplish too much. At the one extreme, there are simple nursing procedures and at the other, quite sophisticated minor operations. Neither extremes would normally be performed by the house officer, or even the senior house officer. The plethora of unnecessary information detracts from what is actually a very useful little book. If this were to be removed, the book would be smaller and possibly

even cheaper than its already low price of £4.95. Despite this criticism, I enjoyed reading the book and I can recommend it to all students and house officers who are learning techniques afresh, or to other medical personnel who wish to brush up on their practical procedures.

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Paediatric Neurology, edited by Edward M. Brett. Pp.x + 613, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1983. £45.00.

This is an attractive, well produced and manageable textbook and the first serious competitor for Menkes' authoritative and popular book, which is now approaching its third edition. It has many of the hallmarks and advantages of single authorship. With the exception of a few chapters, Dr Brett has done the majority of it himself, and has produced an extremely readable book of uniformly high standard and has also struck a good balance between a reasonable size and comprehensive text on the one hand, which can be read for general information, and a detailed and authoritative enough text on the other hand to provide a source of reference on specialized aspects and rarer syndromes. Each chapter is comprehensive and complete in itself and has a useful bibliography, which includes selected, recent references as well as some interesting snippets of historical interest. The 24 chapters cover the whole field of central and peripheral nervous system disorders, also including contributions on mental retardation, learning disorders and genetics.

Paediatric neurology forms a major and important component of the workload of the general paediatrician and this book should provide a useful source of clinical information as well a practical guidance.

There are inevitably some aspects and details of individual presentations with which one might quibble, but this probably reflects a difference of opinion on relative emphasis. Perhaps the weakest chapter in the book is the first one dealing with the neurology of the newborn and is largely a traditional overview written from the safe distance of the paediatric neurologist, who is not involved in the day to day care