Emergencies in Medicine, edited by Alistair D. Beattie & John T. Ireland. Pp248, illustrated. Pitman, London, 1984. £16.00.

As the editor points out in the foreword, this book is based on a symposium held in the Southern General Hospital, Glasgow. Most of the common medical emergencies are considered but with more than 30 contributors and because there were no editorial constraints on the style and format there is a wide variation both in the content and the presentation from one chapter to another.

The book clearly reflects Glasgow medical practice and each contributor has addressed his subject competently and in a manner which reflects his own approach to the problem. It is chiefly intended for young postgraduates who are sitting for higher examinations. Most of the contributors have therefore combined a consideration of the patho-physiological and theoretical aspects of their subject with practical details about management. This is helpful for the examination candidate who is expected to support his proposed treatment with sound scientific knowledge, but it possibly detracts from the value of the book as a practical manual for those seeking to use it as such.

Nevertheless, the book contains much good and up-to-date advice. Thus the need to refer patients with subarachnoid haemorrhage early, for neurological investigation is emphasized while it is recommended that in treating severe hypertension it is usually better to achieve this gradually with oral therapy rather than rapidly with intravenous drugs. There are useful chapters on acute respiratory failure and on the care of the ventilated patient. In the former the use of analgesics and tranquillizers is described. While barbiturates and dextrapropoxyphene cause respiratory centre depression it is pointed out that pethidine may be used for the relief of pain and anxiety, though the suggested dose of 100–150mg intramuscularly at 4–6 hour intervals seems high. The management of self-poisoning, adverse drug reactions and disseminated intravascular coagulation are among other conditions considered.

Although this is not a comprehensive textbook on emergency medicine, these collected papers provide information which should be useful not only to postgraduate students but also to practising physicians and teachers of medicine. The price is reasonable, but it may still deter the impecunious postgraduate.

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Case Studies in Paediatrics, David J. Field & John Stroobant. Pages unnumbered (Pp.iii + 84). Pitman Books, 1984. £5.95.

This book is one of a number of recent publications aimed at helping candidates prepare for examinations in paediatrics. Field and Stroobant have directed their efforts towards the M.R.C.P. in Paediatrics, Part II, and also the D.C.H. examination. The book consists quite simply of a collection of 80 case histories, each followed by a few well directed questions. Commendably brief 'model' answers appear overleaf, highlighting the key features in each presentation and indicating a logical sequence of differential diagnosis. They may also serve to pin-point gaps in the reader's knowledge and areas needing further revisions.

The strength of the book lies in the fact that all the cases are genuine and have been encountered by one or other of the authors in their clinical practice. They are to be commended on the clinical freshness of the presentations since each case is recounted as though the child is still in the emergency room or ward, awaiting diagnosis and appropriate management. The authors are also to be congratulated on the breadth of their clinical experience since relatively few areas of acute medical paediatrics are totally uncovered.

The cases vary from the complex to the straightforward, from the common to the rare, and a few cannot be positively diagnosed on the information given. However, all present valuable areas for discussion and all require careful weighing of the evidence presented since often small pointers are provided to indicate a specific diagnosis. The ability to identify clinical clues is a necessary skill for all doctors but is particularly looked for in candidates at clinical examinations.

Thus, this book provides a most useful exercise for postgraduate students either for self-instruction or for group discussion. It may also provide useful case material for undergraduate teaching since the complexity of the discussion can be guided by the tutor according to the level of the students.

It is recommended as good value.

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