Book Reviews

Endocrine Aspects of Acute Illness, edited by Glenn W. Geelhoed and Bart Chernow. Clinics in Critical Care Medicine Series. Pp. x + 350, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, New York, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, 1985. £39.00.

This volume consists of fifteen review chapters covering numerous important aspects of intensive care medicine from metabolism to nutrition in the critically ill paediatric and adult patient. Specific problems such as diabetic ketoacidosis or hyperglycaemic non-ketotic coma, disturbances of adrenocortical and thyroid function, calcium, magnesium and phosphate metabolism in the critically ill patient are all discussed in individual chapters. The remaining five chapters cover the role of prostaglandins in cardiopulmonary and other critical illnesses, the diagnosis and management of endocrine tumours that often result in crisis situations, such as insulinoma and pheochromocytoma, and the influence of neuropeptides in critical care.

It will be appreciated from the description of its contents, that a better title would have been 'Metabolic and endocrine aspects of acute illness'. The authors are all from American Institutes and therefore certain drugs, e.g. methimazole for thyrotoxicosis, in common practice there, are inappropriate for UK medicine. On the other hand I was surprised that the effect of etomidate, the anaesthetic drug, on the pituitary-adrenal axis was not discussed in the chapter on the adrenal cortex.

This book is aimed at nurses as well as anaesthetists, physicians and surgeons with a special interest in intensive care medicine. Most of the reviews are sensible, comprehensive and well-referenced. However, at £39 the book is expensive and most of the information is available elsewhere.

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Clinical Anesthesia in Neurosurgery, edited by Elizabeth A.M. Frost. Pp. xiv + 480, illustrated. Butterworth, Boston, London, Sydney, Wellington, Durban, Toronto, 1984. £55.00.

There are few up to date books on anaesthesia for neurosurgery and any new addition is welcomed with enthusiasm. This multi-author text has sixteen contributors including the editor. All the authors are from the United States and this book therefore reflects solely American medical practice. The book begins with a somewhat pretentious foreword by Hubert Rosomoff, followed by a good historical introduction by the editor. It is then divided into four main sections – cerebral physiology and evaluation, neurosurgical anaesthesia, central nervous trauma and postoperative and intensive care. The book concludes with a chapter on brain death.

The first section is very uneven. The initial very important chapter on cerebral haemodynamics and metabolism is poor and understanding of vital pathophysiology is hindered by

the lack of diagrams. The other chapters in this section are adequate but have been better covered in other textbooks.

The second section on neurosurgical anaesthesia is much better. Indeed, the chapter on posterior fossa surgery includes the first accurate discussion, in a major textbook, of the pathophysiology of air embolism during neurosurgery in the sitting position.

The third section on head injuries and spinal cord trauma is adequate but would benefit from more subheadings in the text.

The book is well produced with few typographical errors. This book should probably be purchased for departmental libraries mainly on the strength of its section on neurosurgical anaesthesia. For the trainee, 'Handbook of Neuroanaesthesia' is a better and cheaper introduction to the subject.

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Clinical biochemistry nearer the patient, edited by V. Marks & K.G.M.M. Alberti. Contemporary Issues in Clinical Biochemistry, Vol. 2. Pp. x + 240 illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1985. £32.00.

The title of this book encapsulates an important concept. It is not, of course, a new concept: indeed, the idea that clinical biochemistry might be anywhere *not* near the patient would have astounded past generations of doctors. But the fact that the title today strikes an almost revolutionary note illustrates how far bedside and laboratory practice have drifted apart. The effect has been woeful on both. As laboratories offer potentially more and more refined ways of diagnosis they are used by clinicians with less and less discrimination. As new diploma and degree courses ensure that a new breed of science graduates are increasingly committed to a clinical orientation, the chances of their knowledge being put to practical use are becoming progressively dim. The paradoxes could be multiplied. Probably the only beneficiaries of the trend have been the makers of laboratory equipment (one of the few success stories in industry over the past quarter century); and even here profits to the makers and value to the users have not always run in parallel. Can the trend be reversed? And if so, how? The introductory chapter by the editors raises high hopes: they may not provide good answers but they raise good questions. The remaining chapters do not quite fulfil these hopes. Only R.C. Rock comes near to addressing himself to the practical difficulties that a fundamental rethinking of the roles of clinical biochemistry and of clinical biochemists would raise. It would require more than new machines and new methods. Attitudes would have to change. Training would have to be readjusted. Career structures and personal career prospects would be affected. Professional territorial imperatives might have to be questioned and even breached. Compared to these problems the aspects of bedside biochemistry discussed by most of the