Book Reviews

Advanced Medicine 21. Proceedings of a Conference Held at the Royal College of Physicians of London 11–14 February 1985, edited by Morris J. Brown. Pp. x + 450, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1986. £35.00.

With this report the proceedings of the Conferences in Advanced Medicine held at the Royal College of Physicians come of age. They have been of immense value to general physicians working throughout the country.

The 1985 Conference was no exception. It is, however, a great disappointment that the Report has taken so long to publish. Dr Morris Brown wrote his forward to this volume in May, 1985 and it has taken more than a year for the book to appear. A great part of the value of these conferences is that they bring one up to date. Research and knowledge advance very quickly in medicine these days. Opinions about management change quickly too. It should surely be the aim of publishers to get this Report out within the year.

There should have been firmer editing of the figures and tables and their captions. Many captions are difficult to understand or insufficient, presumably because in his talk the lecturer expanded the description. Some figures contain information not referred to in the caption or the text and are therefore irritating. A number of the illustrations have not reproduced well and could have been left out.

Nevertheless, there are some excellent lectures reported here. The topics covered in the Conference were endocrinology, liver and gastro-intestinal disease, cardiology and vascular disease, dermatology, neurology, haematology, a small amount of renal medicine and a section on new methods of diagnostic imaging. Not surprisingly, the style was patchy, some speakers having the gift of clarity and others not. Most lecturers have given their references and this is one of the particular values of this book, it opens the door to a much greater bank of information for those who wish to study a subject in greater detail.

All in all, this book is an excellent weekend's reading for the general physician. However, at £35.00 it is too expensive and it has come out too late. A cheaper production appearing during the autumn following the Conference, even though it might have many blemishes, would be a better proposition.

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Atlas of Drug Reactions, R. Douglas Collins. Pp. xii + 419, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1985. £55.00.

According to the preface, 'there is a need for an alternative to existing sources for a quick reference presenting the adverse reactions to common drugs in a simple, organised and easily remembered fashion.' This colour atlas represents an attempt to fulfil that need. Common unwanted effects are presented

for many drugs on a 'see through' torso. For some this approach works well: corticosteroids and tricyclic antidepressants, for example. However, for others this approach is less satisfactory: it seems a little odd to have Raynaud's phenomenon occurring just below the groin!

A more serious criticism of the book stems from its American origin. The transatlantic drug lag means that 10 of the 34 substances which I looked up were not even mentioned, e.g. amiloride, atenolol, ipratropium, salbutamol, temazepam and trimethoprim, and 2 others (inhaled beclomethasone and ranitidine) are mentioned by name only. Furthermore, the section on calcium blocking drugs is poor – again reflecting limited use of these compounds in the USA.

The other 'unique' feature of the book is a toxicity rating on the frequency, severity and reversibility of adverse reactions. Although attractive in theory, I was unimpressed by the ratings for penicillins, which were the same as digoxin – medium.

In summary, I found this book a disappointment. British prescribers are likely to find the National Formulary of greater use, especially as it contains information on the relative merits of alternative drugs, dosage and presentation. Additional useful information on adverse effects can be gleaned from the ABPI Data Sheet Compendium. Together these reference sources would, in my view, provide a more balanced and fuller account and they are both 'free'.

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Care of the Child with Diabetes, edited by J.D. Baum and A.L. Kinmonth. Pp. xiv + 228, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1985. £24.00.

There is a relative shortage of books devoted to the management of the diabetic child so the contribution by Drs Baum and Kinmonth summarizing the Oxford school of thought is a welcome addition. It is fortunate that the two editors summarized their ideas and experiences before embarking on further careers outside Oxford.

There are three principle sections starting with the traditional format of pathogenesis, natural history and epidemiology of diabetes. A contribution from the father of a diabetic child is informative and beautifully written but seems misplaced. The next section called The Tools of Management by the editors includes useful contributions on insulin and different forms of its delivery, dietary management, the metabolic and hormonal response to exercise and finally a child psychiatrist's role as a member of the diabetic team. There is an undoubted contribution to be made by such a person; however I was disappointed by the contents of this chapter which relied heavily on an anecdotal