Human Experimentation: a Guided Step into the Unknown, William A. Silverman. Pp. xii + 204, illustrated. Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, Tokyo, 1986. £8.95.

This is the paperback edition of a book which first appeared in 1985. Its title is misleading as it is concerned almost entirely with a single aspect of human experimentation, namely, randomized clinical trials. Silverman quotes with complete approval Claud Bernard, 'Gaining experience by relying on observations is different from making experiments and recording the results', and he praises the latter activity and derides the former. As a clinician concerned with diagnostic and management problems I cannot agree with such a sharp distinction.

The book contains an interesting historical and philosophical discussion of randomized clinical trials and describes in precise details the way such trials should be 'scientifically' conducted. Silverman regards the introduction of randomized trials as one of the greatest advances of this century. But such trials have become a sacred cow and any criticism of these is regarded as a hallmark of ignorance and living in the past.

The main purpose of this book is a defence of the randomized trials into the aetiology of retrolental fibrosis (RLF) which the author, when professor of paediatrics at Columbia, N.Y., organized in 1953 and 1954. A Boston group of doctors in 1949 recorded that during the previous 10 years there had been a dramatic increase in the incidence of RLF and that the condition was confined to premature newborns. During the next few years a variety of possible causes were suggested but these were later scaled down to 3, namely, concerning iron, vitamins, and oxygen.

During the period 1950 to 1953 several papers were published which gave strong evidence implicating too liberal use of oxygen. Silverman organized randomized clinical trials to be undertaken in 16 leading USA hospitals, involving over 700 premature infants. Although the evidence incriminating excessive use of oxygen was very strong it was not conclusive and it was uncertain whether the degree of concentration of the oxygen or the duration of its giving was more important. Furthermore, the value of oxygen in prevention of brain damage in premature infants was recognised and therefore its use could not be banned.

One group taking part in that trial was from Bellevue, N.Y. who justified their experiment as follows, 'Adequate controls are needed to establish the relationship (RLF and oxygen therapy) beyond question. The present study was designed to test this relationship under controlled conditions' (*JAMA* 1954, 155: 223). For their contribution those doctors gave high oxygen dosage to 36 premature infants, and 8 of them developed RLF with resultant irreversible blindness. Silverman very surprisingly does not mention these figures or those from the other 15 centres who took part in the randomized trial.

I strongly recommend the lecture by Lord Scarman, reprinted in *J R Soc Med* 1986, 79: 697, which discusses the legal aspects of randomized clinical trials.

M.H. Pappworth
Vale Lodge,
Vale of Health,
London NW3 1AX.

Medicine: the Bare Bones: a Comprehensive Systematic Approach, E.H.I. Friedman and R.E. Moshy. Wiley Medical Publications. Pp. xxxviii + 556. John Wiley, Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto, Singapore, 1986. £14.95.

This is a most unusual book. The authors set out to cover the whole of the undergraduate clinical curriculum in a very small compass and it must be admitted that very little of any importance has been completely omitted. However, this near-miracle has only been achieved by very extensive use of abbreviations – conventional and otherwise – and, although a glossary is provided, the result is very difficult to read. Scattered within this highly compressed text are lists – over 300 of them – mostly of causes of symptoms or other manifestations of disease. Those who prefer to learn by memorising material parrot-fashion would find these useful.

Perhaps the weakest aspect of the book is the very cursory reference, in most sections, to therapeutics. The single word 'steroids' under the treatment of sarcoidosis is hardly adequate and there are more SE (= side effects) of frusemide than hirsutism. The index, satisfactory in most other respects, is woefully inadequate on drugs. Final-year students who spent some time with this book made similar comments to those above and, in general, were unenthusiastic.

The authors have clearly spent a great deal of time and effort in the preparation of this book and have consulted widely outside their own specialties of community medicine and radiology. It seems churlish, therefore, to reward this effort with unfavourable comments but this book really cannot be recommended when there are available so many other sources of information and ways of revising for examinations.

P.R. Fleming
Charing Cross and Westminster Medical School
Page Street Wing
Westminster Hospital
17 Page Street
London SW1P 2AP

Modern Management of Common Skin Diseases, edited by Christopher F.H. Vickers. Pp. xii + 231, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1986. £17.50.

This book aims high. It sets out to be a 'colour and text atlas' on current management of common skin diseases for primary care physicians. The list of contributors is international so that the book is applicable to practice worldwide. It falls short of its target in some respects.

As an atlas its illustrations are of a high standard but a few of the photographs are not good and some are not ideal examples of the condition illustrated.

This book concentrates on management but more detail on how to use therapy is needed. Tantalisingly, some preparations are mentioned in the text but are omitted from the formulary at the back of the book. Conversely, discussion of the rare skin disorders, phototesting or immunofluorescence findings are unnecessary for the primary care physician. Schedules for the administration of retinoid drugs could also have been omitted, leaving more space for discussion of the

common diseases and pitfalls in treatment.

In spite of these criticisms this is a good postgraduate dermatology textbook. It is concise, readable and yet contains a wealth of information. It is also excellent value for money.

A.E. Myatt
Bradford Royal Infirmary,
Duckworth Lane,
Bradford,
W. Yorks BD9 6RJ.

Recent Advances in Diabetes. No. 2, edited by Malcolm Nattrass. Pp. xi + 213, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1986. £35.00.

This volume will be of great value to those with a special interest in diabetes. It contains sixteen review articles; approximately half are 'scientific' and half clinical; all will be, I believe, of interest to clinicians. The scientific articles include 'The aetiology of Type 2 diabetes', 'The human insulin gene and diabetes', 'Lipoprotein metabolism' and 'Neutrophil function in diabetes'; and on the clinical side 'The Somogyi effect', 'Microalbuminuria', 'Management of diabetic renal failure' and 'The heart in diabetes': these are the ones which I found of most interest.

Recent Advances in Diabetes is well produced and is an excellent source of reference and of references. My only complaint is that most of the articles are poorly written and rather difficult to read. I would have wished the editor to edit more. Recent advances in medicine should almost by definition be exciting and the reader should feel involved and excited. Style matters as well as content. Writing well is not easy and those journals that maintain a high standard (*Scientific American*, *Science*, *The New England Journal of Medicine*) are heavily edited and have a recognizable style. Read 'The Somogyi effect'; it is well written and it makes you want to read Somogyi's original paper. That said there is a lot in this volume; definitely recommended.

A.B. Kurtz
Middlesex Hospital Medical School,
London W1P 7PN.

Recent Advances in Paediatrics. No. 8, edited by Roy Meadow. Pp. vi + 284, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1986. £28.00.

Recent Advances in Paediatrics has for many years been indispensable reading for busy paediatricians. Its topical and authoritative articles reflect considerable effort with one chapter alone having 178 references. Fifteen chapters by nineteen authors cover a wide spectrum from intensive care to child sexual abuse where in an excellent but lengthy chapter a psychiatrist and psychologist provide valuable insights into this the most underdiagnosed aspect of child abuse. The long term effects with low self esteem, depression, high dependency and cycle of abuse in future generations are highlighted. We are well reminded not to encourage a child's

disclosure without being ready to handle the medical, psychological and legal consequences. All paediatricians and school doctors will have to learn the skills to recognize and manage the emotional and medico-legal problems.

A timely article on AIDS and other immune deficiencies fails to bring us quite up to date, the most contemporary references being 1985 in an area of rapidly expanding knowledge where the rate of development of AIDS amongst those who are HIV sero-positive is constantly being revised upwards with the passage of time and it maybe six times the 5–10% given by the authors.

The chapter, 'The Changing Epidemiology of Childhood Infections' is older terrain revisited and we are warned against complacency and reminded that even in England and Wales, if congenital disorders and perinatal conditions are excluded, infectious diseases amount for 10% of childhood deaths. A generation of parents is growing up more influenced by adverse publicity about immunization, than the consequences of the wild disease. The Asian community has particular problems with tuberculosis, and following the habit of taking the new baby back to show the grandparents in the New Commonwealth before immunization has commenced, may reintroduce poliomyelitis and even diphtheria into this country.

'Doppler Echocardiography' and 'Modern Diagnostic Imaging' were given a chapter each and we learn that information now being obtained by non-invasive methods is of sufficient accuracy to make major management decisions without cardiac catheterization. Two excellent chapters on 'Hypoxia and the Neonatal Brain' and 'Modern Intensive Care' outline the new techniques for monitoring and controlling intra-cranial pressure and minimizing the damage from cerebral oedema with its resultant secondary intra-cranial injury. Most paediatricians would probably be surprised to learn that 43% of children with Reyes' syndrome can survive undamaged if evacuated to neurointensive care units quickly enough.

All the authors were selected for their expertise and clarity by the editor Professor Roy Meadow. Not all were equally lucid or succinct however and if there is a criticism of this admirable book it would be that more and shorter chapters would be preferable. Some of the best chapters are the most economical and the sort most likely to be read for understanding and enjoyment by paediatricians as the editor hopes.

A.P. Cole
Worcester Royal Infirmary,
Castle Street Branch,
Worcester WR1 3AS.

Self-Assessment for Paediatric Examinations, David Isaacs and Christopher D. Mitchell. Pp. iv + 165, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1986. £8.95.

Doctors wishing to specialise in paediatrics face the hurdle of the M.R.C.P. in which most take the paediatric option; others settle for the D.C.H. Whatever higher professional diploma the candidate faces there is a need for adequate preparation in exam technique. Finally, the aspirant will be judged by performance on the day and it is plainly inap-