admission summaries, then two concerned with computer-aided learning, and two covering 'decision support' systems, with the examples of drug prescribing and prediction of outcome after severe head injury. There are then four chapters giving examples of on-line data capture and analysis, for estimation of lung water accumulation, electrochemical sensing of physiological variables, measurement of colonic blood flow and Doppler waveform analysis.

Few would disagree that the field of computer applications in medicine has in the past been quite densely planted with many ineffective, now obsolete systems and approaches. Whereas the motivation for and value of a series of workshop meetings is easy to appreciate, in this translation into book form, a number of limitations are evident. In several chapters there is a rather depressing emphasis on ephemeral technical detail, and a tendency to offer pontifical predictions and judgements. These rather spoil the aim of offering the reader a balanced and practical appreciation of the potential for new approaches in tackling well recognised and everyday problems.

The better chapters have approached this quality, but in such a short space can only scratch the surface of the issues raised. Those on assessment of clinical outcome after severe head injury and on electrochemical sensing systems give balanced views, with appropriate technical detail and a clear account from the clinical and scientific perspectives. Some of the other chapters can be less relied on as sources of information. The general description of the problem faced and coverage of previous work is very limited and therefore might mislead in a number of areas, and the technical quality of some of the systems described also appears rather questionable.

There has been sustained and relevant research in medical computing or informatics over the past twenty-five years. It is a pity that a good deal of this goes unmentioned here, but we are given instead much fairly inappropriate contemporary detail, for example of the inner workings of the BBC microcomputer. A recent survey of computer-assisted learning programs in Holland showed that a large proportion of newly developed material rapidly lapsed into disuse (with a half-life of about two years). A similar fate probably awaits many current microcomputer systems developments. We must seek to understand why this pattern prevails, and thereby to learn more from past experience when planning new approaches.

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The Normal Child: Some Problems of the Early Years and their Treatment. Ninth Edition, Ronald S. Illingworth. Pp. xi+442, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1987. £17.50.

This remarkable text, which now spans a third of a century, remains as lively and refreshing in this ninth edition as it must have seemed on its first appearance.

Despite the author's vast experience across the whole field of child health, he has often written of the extreme difficulty of the practice of paediatrics in child health clinics. In them, the doctor's role essentially is to advise parents on the wide range of normal child development, function and behaviour and to be confident in recognising the small number of children who genuinely fall outside that range. Professor Illingworth's awareness of the difficulties of that task has determined the content of *The Normal Child* and has been responsible for its wide and continuing popularity over the years.

The crisp style, wry humour and the succinct discussion of differing viewpoints remain unchanged but Professor Illingworth's encyclopaedic knowledge of child development and its literature has been kept fully up to date and changing patterns of care noted and sometimes lamented, for instance by the withdrawal of dicyclomine for the treatment of the baby with 'colic'. Incidentally some might now prefer to see bromocriptine recommended for the suppression of lactation.

The determinants of child behaviour and the interplay between the child and the family are discussed at some length. There is perhaps scope for further discussion of how the parents' responses can reinforce undesirable patterns of behaviour in the child, particularly in view of the therapeutic opportunities provided by an understanding of such a process.

It is easy to see why Illingworth's *Normal Child* has been so successful for thirty years. It remains excellent value for money and the latest edition will continue to prove as valuable a source of information, sound common sense and reassurance as its distinguished predecessors.

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An Outline of Clinical Diagnosis. 2nd Edition, Brian J. Prout and John G. Cooper. Pp. 264. Wright, Bristol, 1987. £8.50.

I did enjoy this book and I have profited so much from it. When I was a young, over-confident and experienced senior registrar, I wrote a book on infections. I gave a copy, of course, to my chief, Hugh Marriot, who said, 'You can be certain that one person has benefited from this erudition, namely the author'. The same can be said about the two authors of this lively monograph. They have researched assiduously from the other textbooks of the day, and they must surely have benefited from that onerous task. Out of it has come an outline of clinical diagnosis full of facts, charts, tables and flow diagrams. The twenty-eight chapters cover most systems of the body, and each chapter has helpful advice and marginal valuable hints.

The senior author, a man of great drive and energy, has sadly died, and the co-author is now a physician in Norway. It is such a good and cheap book that I hope that he will continue on the present lines. I am sending my copy to the United States, where they need it most. This small, value-for-money paperback will help medical