Book Reviews

Drug Treatment in Psychiatry, edited by Trevor Silverstone & Paul Turner. Pp. x + 282. Routledge, London and New York, 1988. £12.95.

This is now a standard text book already into its fourth edition in a subject of great importance. The first part of the book deals with the biochemistry of mental illness. This is in many ways an unsatisfactory subject because we clearly know very little of what actually happens to the brain in mental illness, so that there is much more in our knowledge that has to be conjectural than in most branches of medical physiology and biochemistry. Relatively little basic understanding is needed in order to learn to use the relatively few drugs that we possess in an intelligent fashion. This is particularly so since there has been no major advance in psychiatric drug treatment, except for lithium and depot neuroleptics, since 1959, by which time the earliest of each class of drugs that we use had been discovered.

There is an excellent chapter on the social and psychological aspects of drug treatment.

The second half of the book on clinical applications seems somewhat thin. Most of the knowledge in it should be observed by an SHO at the end of a 6 month job in an acute unit, and there is little in the book for senior registrars or consultants. There is an unusually good chapter on disorders of appetite and body weight, and the weight enhancing effects of most psychotropic drugs are given the importance they deserve.

I wonder if the book would be better if in future editions some greater detail is given about the growing points of the subject and if specific papers by specific authors are discussed. I would have liked to read more about new discoveries – is buspirone going to make it possible to cut down the prescription of benzodiazepines very greatly? How does one actually treat patients who are prepared in principle to come off benzodiazepines? Is carbamazepine as good as lithium for preventing affective relapse, or is it different? Do the two together wear better than when given separately? Is sulpiride going to be useful for negative symptoms in schizophrenia? Will fluoxetine really work in helping depressed patients who do not want to get fat without making them sick? I would have found it useful to have these and similar areas more critically examined.

M.J. Tarsh
*Bowden House Clinic,
Harrow-on-the-Hill,
Middlesex HA1 3JL.*

Dilemmas in Otorhinolaryngology, edited by D.F.N. Harrison. Pp. xii + 374. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1988. £45.00.

On pulling this book off the bookshop shelf and flicking through the pages the reader could so easily be put off purchasing it. There is hardly a photograph or illustration in it to catch the eye. Sadly I feel the price will dissuade many from adding it to their personal collection. However, this book has been produced to last.

Professor Harrison has chosen 21 controversial topics

from across the range of otorhinolaryngology and asked at least two contributors to present a separate view on each topic. In addition a senior member of the specialty has been asked to write a short critique of the two views expressed. The contributors involved are from departments throughout the world.

Some chapters are masterful in their erudite differentiation between proven fact and dogmatic prejudice. Sadly such standards are not maintained throughout the book but the perceptive reader should have no difficulty in identifying the material from which to derive a reasonable opinion.

This is an interesting and successful attempt at demonstrating the dynamic process that leads to change within a specialty of medicine. It is well worth reading. I am sure it will sell well in America but it would not be my first choice for the ENT section of a hospital library in the UK struggling with a limited budget.

M.R. Hawthorne
*North Riding Infirmary,
Middlesbrough,
Cleveland TS1 5JE.*

Genital Tract Infections in Women, edited by M.J. Hare. Pp. x + 378, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, 1988. £50.00.

This multi-author book will be a most welcome addition to the practising gynaecologist's reference collection. It really does cover the majority of genital tract infections in women very well indeed. It is divided into logical sections dealing with investigations, specific organisms and their treatment, and the effects and consequences of these disorders. Unfortunately, there are few references more recent than 1985 which is a pity as sexually transmitted diseases have changed considerably during the last three years. Human immunovirus and hepatitis are hardly covered at all, and although they do not cause lower genital tract problems, I think that fuller sections on these potentially disastrous diseases would have been beneficial to the book.

There are a few colour plates in the centre of the book but possibly the inclusion of a few more would have been helpful. However, my criticisms are minor ones and I do feel that this book is a most important addition to all library bookshelves and that it will help clinicians whose knowledge of many of these problems is often scanty and easily becomes outdated. At £50 the book is fairly expensive but it is nicely bound and the typeface is easy to read. I highly recommend it.

Linda Cardozo
*King's College Hospital,
Denmark Hill,
London SE5 9RS.*

Learning Physiology through MCQ, Mary L. Forsling. Pp. viii + 222. John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto, Singapore, 1988. £8.95.

In this smallish book Mary Forsling presents the reader with

a little over two hundred multiple choice questions (MCQs). Each page has an MCQ and a page or less of text which relates the material on which the question is based, together with the answers to the MCQ. The MCQs cover general physiology, body fluids, the systems of the body and the coordinated functions of body systems. Only one form of MCQ is used, that involving a stem and five statements. Each statement must be judged true or false. The single form of MCQ and the lack of statistical evaluation of the questions mean that the book is of little help to those interested in the design of MCQ assessments. Having said this, the book is clearly intended as a text for learning physiology and it should be judged as such.

Obviously the piecemeal approach to the subject and the general lack of text figures do not make this a suitable text for the novice student, but for the more advanced student the book has several valuable features. Firstly, the MCQ format allows self assessment of one's knowledge. Attempting to answer the questions really does generate a strong desire to read on and clarify areas of ignorance or uncertainty. Second, any area of the subject can be quickly evaluated in this way, due to the systematic organization of the questions and text. Third, the book provides excellent practice in answering MCQs and in restraining the strong but inappropriate desire to guess answers on the basis of inadequate information.

For the teacher of physiology the book provides a very useful source of information for small group learning activities.

John Patterson

*The Medical College of St Bartholomew's Hospital,
Charterhouse Square,
London EC1M 6BQ.*

Magnesium in Clinical Practice, Jean Durlach. Pp. xix + 360. John Libbey, London, 1988. £35 UK.; \$68 US.; FF415.

This book is written by Jean Durlach and translated by David Wilson. Unfortunately, the introduction did not tell me who either were. Jean Durlach is, presumably, a French physician, but having read the book, I assume that David Wilson is not medically qualified. This really is a terrible book. Not only is the translation so bad as to make the book impossible to read, but also the lay out of the book is poor and the contents of dubious value. Sixty pages are devoted to latent magnesium deficiency, a condition characterized biochemically by a normal serum calcium and usually a normal serum magnesium. The disorder apparently causes a wide variety of conditions, especially those usually associated with personality problems but including such conditions as hypercalcaemia, hypocalcaemia, Bartter's syndrome, osteogenesis imperfecta, pseudogout, dysmenorrhoea, mitral valve prolapse and many more. No evidence is presented to substantiate these claims.

One and a half pages are devoted to the life threatening severe hypocalcaemia, which is secondary to hypomagnesaemia caused by certain antibiotics and cancer chemotherapeutic agents.

It comes as no surprise that I cannot recommend this book to anybody.

D.A. Heath

*Department of Medicine,
Queen Elizabeth Hospital,
Birmingham B15 2TH.*

Learning Psychiatry through MCQ, Tom Sensky. Pp. x + 259. John Wiley, Chichester, West Sussex, 1988. £9.95.

I was fully prepared to hate this book but could not. Its title is misleading as it suggests a collection of MCQs to be learnt by rote with the purpose of passing the exam. In fact the bulk of the book is made up of a series of short essays, 135 in all, on a variety of important psychiatric topics headed by an MCQ which is based upon the text. The book could just as well be considered as a text on psychiatry with a series of MCQs that the reader can use to test how well he has understood the text – a more acceptable aim somehow than proposing a text to help the student understand the MCQ. The topics were almost entirely clinical and were aimed at the medical student. The volume would be of limited value in the examination for Membership of the Royal College of Psychiatrists as some are too simple and there is very little cover of the sciences that are basic to psychiatry that form a considerable part of the examination.

The questions have been tested on a group of students and average scores computed. The correlation between the score on individual questions with the student's overall ability has been made. There emerges the paradox of why some questions scored better for poor than for good students, e.g. the question of child abuse has a correlation of -0.34 and one on multi infarct dementia -0.24 . The question that was answered best was one on schizophrenia (a special interest of the head of department). The question that was answered worst was on alcoholism underlining the recent recommendation for better teaching of this subject at student level.

O.W. Hill

*St Luke's Woodside Hospital,
Muswell Hill,
London N10 3HU.*

Recent Advances in Otolaryngology-6, edited by Roger Gray & John Rutka. Pp. viii + 253, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, 1988. £35.00.

It is seven years since the last *Recent Advances in Otolaryngology* was published. This edition consists of 14 chapters by authors from Britain and Canada.

Since the last edition there have been great advances, particularly in investigations, including imaging, and sound analysis and amplification. Regarding otological surgical techniques, the authors concentrate particularly on neurosurgery via the ear, and there is a chapter on biomaterials and tissue glues.

Professor Peter Alberti, of Toronto, gives a succinct chapter on hearing loss in infancy and its investigation, pointing out the values particularly of evoked response audiometry. An interesting chapter by Mr Gray discusses integrated circuits for management for sensorineural hearing loss, including bone conduction implants and cochlear implants. The chapter on radiological advances is particularly interesting and we await with interest the role that M.R.I. will have to play for investigation of suspected cerebello-pontine angle tumours. Other interesting chapters include one on medicolegal trends in Great Britain and Canada, and an interesting case is quoted where a Philadel-