

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-