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-

phia jury awarded nearly one million US dollars to a woman who complained that a computer tomography scan destroyed her psychic powers!

This text of 253 pages is an interesting precis of recent advances in our speciality. It makes easy reading, and should be on the bookshelf of all ENT departments.

David Kilby
Freeman Hospital,
High Heaton,
Newcastle upon Tyne NE7 7DN.

Spinal Cord Dysfunction: Assessment, edited by L.S. Illis. Pp. xiii + 303. Oxford Medical Publications, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988. £40.00.

This book, edited by L.S. Illis, is the work of a workshop into basic research into spinal cord injury. It is written by specialists in neurology, neurophysiology and spinal injury and neuropathology. It should be stated at the outset that it is not a book that teaches you how to treat spinal injury patients, it is a textbook for the advanced student to show the advances that are taking place.

Some of the chapters have been written by people actively engaged in research and there is a very stimulating chapter by Fehlings and Tator explaining how traumatic injuries can be produced as an experimental model in animals. There is an excellent chapter by P.L. Cook on the radiology of the spine; this is a long chapter and it is quite clear that he has a detailed practical knowledge of the problems and how they can be surmounted in studying spinal cord injuries. There is a very good review chapter by Cole on the subject of the autonomic nervous system. The chapter by Massey is rather theoretical and it is quite clear that he has not dealt with spinal cord injuries as he deals with the bladder as though it were a neurophysiological preparation. There are excellent chapters by Swash, Dimitrijevic, Rothwell and Woolf.

This book should be on the shelf of the postgraduate library for reference by anyone who is a student of spinal cord injury.

J.R. Silver
National Spinal Injuries Centre,
Stoke Mandeville Hospital,
Aylesbury, Bucks HP21 8AL.

Stroke, Derick T. Wade. Pp. xi + 98. Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, Tokyo, 1988. £4.50.

I was concerned when I first saw this book that it was written by a neurologist and most of the care of patients with stroke is carried out by GPs and geriatricians. My suspicions were further aroused when I saw on the back cover that it 'tells the GP all he needs to know when confronted by a stroke patient' – visions of blackboards and short trousers. My suspicions were rapidly allayed on opening the book. The author deals clearly, concisely and completely with the philosophy of management and epidemiology of stroke. This is followed by

chapters on diagnosis, immediate management and more long-term problems. The book sensitively deals with physical and emotional problems experienced by the patient and family, who can help them, and how. Balanced advice is given about using fashionable methods of treatment of stroke. A chapter on prevention is included. Particularly welcome features are a check list of what to do for patients and their families at various specific times in the development of this problem and the list of sources of patient literature and support. I rarely find it difficult to find fault with a book but this book deals very fully with the physical, psychological and social aspects of this problem in a general practice setting. One's final impression on finishing the book is that if Dr Wade is that good a physician, it is a pity that he has to practise shut up inside a hospital. His book has a far wider application.

E. Martin
15 Church End,
Biddenham,
Bedford.

Surgical Lasers, a Clinical Guide, edited by T.A. Fuller. Pp. xvi + 237, illustrated. Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1987. £68.

This book is beautifully presented and is a pleasure to read, the paper, printing and illustrations, many of them colour, being generally excellent. However, as in many multi-authored works, it suffers from loose editing and, as in many laser texts, its pages are scattered with oft quoted misconceptions that could easily mislead the reader.

The first chapter on fundamentals of laser surgery, written by the editor, is a useful introduction to this rapidly evolving technology. Subsequent chapters cover many surgical specialties in which lasers have been assessed but there is no chapter on (cardio)vascular surgery which is perhaps the most recent and in many ways the most exciting area of ophthalmology in which the place of lasers in routine management is best established. There is no mention of lithotripsy techniques.

The references, only one of which is post 1985, are generally extensive but citation is inconsistent. In some chapters they are incorporated in the text and infuriatingly, not in others. Enumeration of safety aspects, surely a vital topic, is confined to eight short paragraphs in the chapter on lasers in intra-abdominal gynaecological surgery and it is not indexed. There is no adequate discussion of the special anaesthetic requirements for laser surgery. The preface states three goals of the book. It will provide information and encourage participation, but it does not present a single volume source for practical clinical laser applications. Admire it and enjoy it, as I did, but you will have to look elsewhere to complete the picture.

Neil P.J. Walker
University College London,
The Rayne Institute,
London WC1E 6JJ.