Book Reviews

Diagnostic Tests in Neurology, G.D. Perkin. Pp. viii + 322, illustrated. Chapman and Hall, London, 1988. £19.95.

This is the first of a series which will include diagnostic tests in respiratory medicine, gastroenterology, and cardiology. The object of this book is to discuss the desirability of performing investigations in known neurological conditions, and in undiagnosed patients with neurological symptoms. Where investigation is recommended, Dr Perkin suggests the most appropriate scheme of management. The book includes 15 flow diagrams as an aid to diagnosis. It is intended for undergraduates and postgraduate students, and all those involved in the management of patients with neurological disorders, both as doctors in training or established clinicians. One principle of the series is that careful clinical examination is an essential pre-requisite for the selection of appropriate investigations.

Dr Perkin has tackled a difficult task. The book fills a gap between the traditional textbook of neurology and for instance textbooks on neuroradiology and neurophysiology. This could lead to problems of organisation, and Dr Perkin has chosen to give a brief review of the investigations available to clinical neurologists, and then to consider their use in specific groups of conditions. It is a scholarly work, and contains a large number of up-to-date references. The need for accuracy of clinical diagnosis is frequently stressed, and also the need to use appropriate investigations and avoid unnecessary tests or those of uncertain value. The hazard of some investigations is also considered. Some mention is made of the cost of various investigations, and Dr Perkin rightly scorns the use of a standard battery of tests for certain conditions. It might be helpful for some patients to read the book!

One difficulty with this approach is that of the wide variety of skill and experience amongst clinicians. After reading this book, the non-neurologist and indeed the neurologist will be encouraged to make more precise use of the tests available, but the amount of investigation ordered is still likely to depend upon clinical experience and confidence. Also many of the investigations depend upon the skill, experience and energy of the person who carries them out, e.g. the neuroradiologist. Inevitably the tests considered, and the standards required, are those of the institute, rather than the district hospital, where most neurology actually happens.

For me this is a general problem with the book. There is an assumption of a superior level of clinical skill and the availability of superior resources both technical and intellectual in the investigation departments. Nowhere is it suggested that the reader might be better advised to ask for a more skilled opinion. This is particularly telling with regard to cerebral abscess. This condition is, incidentally, not included in the chapters on neurological emergencies, but appears in the section on infections, which curiously did not include meningitis and encephalitis (found in one of the chapters on emergencies). Nowhere was it mentioned that neurosurgical advice should be taken. Subarachnoid haemorrhage, head injury and acute spinal cord compression also feature on the section on neurological emergencies, where again a neurosurgical opinion might be taken before embarking on investigations. The EEG gets rather short shrift. One third of

the paragraph devoted to it is given over to Matthews' (1973) hatchet job. There is a longer section on PET scanning, which, as Dr Perkin mentions, was only available in 24 centres worldwide! Some account is given of the use of depth electrodes in assessing intractable epilepsy, but there is no mention of the newer techniques such as foramen ovale electrodes. There might, for instance, have been some reference to visual sensitivity, petit mal and benign focal epilepsy. Incidentally, we are told that EEG is now routinely performed with 16 channels, whereas in fact, many departments in the UK use a 20-channel machine. Also in the section on epilepsy it was a bit of a surprise to be recommended that 'metabolic studies are appropriate in all patients with single or multiple seizures'. The studies are not specified (?hypoglycaemia etc.) It would seem better also to obtain a CT scan before the EEG in patients over thirty (those suspected of symptomatic epilepsy).

Other minor quibbles were the recommendation to use a glucose tolerance test in preference to fasting blood sugar in situations where diabetes might be suspected. Serum B₁₂ estimation is recommended in the investigation of peripheral neuropathy without any real explanation. In the discussion of ocular palsies, there was no mention of intra-orbital lesions other than thyroid eye disease. The explanation of the physical principles of MRI left me mystified. Perhaps some diagrams would have helped. We could have had some description of the physical principles of other investigations, e.g. CT scanning, visual evoked responses (no mention of electronic averaging). Perhaps in a book on diagnostic tests in neurology, we also ought to have description of how to carry out a lumbar puncture.

In spite of these objections, this is a useful book, especially for reference, and, particularly with clinical audit in mind, many clinicians might wish to consult it.

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Loss and Bereavement, The Lisa Sainsbury Foundation Series, Bridget Cook and Shelagh G. Phillips. Pp viii + 90, illustrated. Austen Cornish in association with The Lisa Sainsbury Foundation, London, 1988. £6.50 (incl p & p).

The writers of this excellent book point out that training courses for the caring professions contain little about the difficulties people face when suffering bereavement and other major losses. The carers themselves often feel inadequate. The book covers most aspects of the significance of loss and struggle to the lives of individuals. 'Loss' is used widely to cover not only death but loss of limbs, status, faculties, material possessions, redundancy, retirement and marital breakdown.

Determinants of grief and different types of death experience and the difficulties liable to arise in death of children, loss and bereavement in childhood, as well as suicide, accidental death, death in maturity and old age, and as a result of illness, are all dealt with well and with good understanding.

This book emphasizes that the coping ability of past experience of separation and losses in childhood, will have a bearing on how the adult individual will cope and relate to others in bereavement.

The necessity for the various types of grieving is covered, and much help and advice is given to carers, practical matters as well as therapeutic help. The book also points out the necessity for support for carers, especially those working with the dying and the terminally ill.

This book is condensed but comprehensive and well recommended, giving information and instruction for all those who come into contact with bereavement and loss.

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Radiology, edited by Robert F. Bury. Pp. ix + 99. Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, Toronto, 1988. £4.50.

This is a jolly good little book. Not every general practitioner will rush out to buy it for himself – but it is a book which should be on the shelf of every training general practice library. The author is a good communicator and the first chapter should be essential reading for the trainee in his first month in general practice. It is refreshing to read a book on radiology where the author is so enthusiastic about direct access by general practitioners to the X-ray department and positively invigorating to read that there is no reason why general practitioners should not also have access to nuclear medicine investigations!

The book covers every aspect of radiology that could be encountered in general practice but its small size, by necessity, means that each subject is dealt with very briefly. However, this information is clearly presented, to the point, and leaves the reader in no doubt as to the value of the investigation and its relation to clinical findings. It is a pity that the excellent chapter on the 'Breast,' due to careless binding, finds itself in the chapter on 'Imaging in the Eighties.'

This book fulfils its aim, ensuring that the patient is prepared for whatever examination awaits him and that the general practitioner is equipped to get the best out of his local X-ray department.

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Therapeutic Claims in Multiple Sclerosis, William A. Sibley. Pp. x + 198. Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1988. £7.95.

In a condition as unpredictable and variable as multiple sclerosis it is probably inevitable that a plethora of claims will be made for a wide variety of therapies. In addition, multiple sclerosis seems to encourage the formation of self-help groups and societies where unorthodox and unproven treatment is promulgated. Most neurologists are, therefore, only too familiar with being questioned by sufferers from this condition about treatments that the doctor has never heard of. This book is a valuable source of reference to provide answers to questions of this type.

The International Federation of Multiple Sclerosis Societies and the National Multiple Sclerosis Society of the United States have formed a 'Therapeutic Claims Committee' of distinguished neurologists from both sides of the Atlantic. Their Chairman, Professor Sibley, has written the second edition of this book.

It deals first in terms suitable for the layman with current knowledge of the nature, incidence and course of the disease. Treatment is then considered starting with a balanced appraisal of the difficulties of assessing the efficacy of treatment in this condition, and continuing with an account of the accepted methods of management of the acute exacerbation, and treatment designed to prevent progression of the disease. Symptomatic treatment is discussed and, finally, a large number of unorthodox methods of treatment are considered. This section is perhaps the most useful for the practising doctor because he can there find a description of any scientific assessment of even the most obscure forms of treatment.

This volume should be accessible as a reference work for all physicians who treat multiple sclerosis.

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Directory of Vocational Training Schemes for General Practice, edited by R. Hawkins. Pp. 101. Hawker Publications Ltd, London, 1988. £5.95.

It is difficult to short-list and select at interview the best doctors for ones own local vocational training scheme, from the many excellent candidates who apply. How much harder, then, for even the brightest house officer or junior SHO to successfully negotiate the transition via one of more than 200 vocational training schemes available to his or her chosen practice.

The *Directory of Vocational Training Schemes for General Practice* offers a welcome helping hand to the would be trainee. It begins with an historical perspective of the development of general practice and the subsequent establishment of the trainee practitioner scheme in 1948. The continued progression towards the present model is unfolded. It goes on to describe the regulations which govern the certification of necessary experience and the role of the JCPGTGP. It includes a section on 'How to apply for a practice vacancy' and one on partnership agreement, which highlights the problems faced by the new junior partner. It reminds us that there are medical colleagues in the present 'sellers' market who are not slow to exploit the situation. Happily, they are a minority and the book moves on to the MRCPG examination, which may be viewed as the 'pinnacle' of vocational training and is the admission to membership of the College. Finally, there is a description of every vocational training scheme.

This is a valuable and useful handbook for general practice trainees.

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