

Book Reviews

Antenatal and Perinatal Causes of Handicap, N. Patel. Pp. x + 240. Baillière Tindall, London, Philadelphia, Sydney, Tokyo, Toronto, 1988. £15.00.

In an era when defence subscriptions for obstetricians are reaching stratospheric proportions this slim volume is certainly timely. It brings together a group of distinguished European contributors from the fields of obstetrics, epidemiology, neonatology and neurology to review current data on the relationship between antenatal and perinatal events and longterm disability. In 15 short but heavily referenced chapters it covers the entire field ranging from the known genetic causes of neurodevelopmental impairment, through to the use of noninvasive screening techniques in the neonatal period to predict long-term outcome.

Although it undoubtedly provides an authoritative overview of the state of current knowledge I found this book rather difficult and at times confusing to read. There are all the usual problems of multi-author textbooks with some wearisome repetition and unevenness of style. On several occasions there seem to be overt disagreements on matters of fact between contributors. I would have welcomed much more in the way of editorial comments and analysis. It is all too apparent that the rapidly expanding literature is beset by lack of agreement over terminology, poorly designed and controlled studies and frankly conflicting results.

As an overview of the current state of knowledge in a complex and rapidly expanding area this book has much to offer. However I found it also a cautionary reminder of how little in the way of assured results a large amount of scientific endeavour has produced.

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Crofton and Douglas's Respiratory Diseases, 4th edition, A. Seaton, D. Seaton & A.G. Leitch. Pp.1215. Blackwell Scientific Publications, Oxford. £79.50.

This splendid textbook is a Scottish heavyweight champion. Scottish because it was born in style in the Department of Chest Diseases, Edinburgh University, and heavyweight because it weighs several pounds. John Crofton and Andrew Douglas were the original midwives and they should be proud of the fact that it has reached a commendable fourth edition. They and the publishers have given the present authors a free hand to rewrite what is now an international classic. There are new chapters on clinical pharmacology, cystic fibrosis, drug-induced diseases, and on lung disease in the immunocompromised host. The sickle cell syndrome has been incorporated into a chapter on the lung in systemic disease, and there is a short chapter on the management of terminal illness. This means that there is something for everybody in this voluminous textbook, for the chest physician, of course, but also for the general physician,

paediatrician, radiologist, pathologist and haematologist. It is a most informative reference source for every discipline which has an interface with pulmonary disease. Indeed, each of the 45 chapters could be regarded as a small compact monograph in its own right. For instance, the chapter on drugs used in respiratory disease occupies 77 pages and has 500 references. The chapter on pneumonia is 160 pages long and has 527 references. And this sets one wondering whether 527 references on pneumonia are really necessary and whether 478 references are needed on lung cancer. Could this be an Achilles heel which will need correcting in the fifth edition? The 264 references on sarcoidosis are far too many for some of these references are over 40 years old and have been replaced and cancelled out by more recent ones which are also included. One suspects that the new authors inherited Crofton and Douglas's references of yesteryear without ruthless pruning with the result that this excellent textbook is loaded with 2469 references. A very helpful new chapter, which had not been inherited, is only supported by twelve references and they are quite sufficient. With fewer out-of-date references the fifth edition could be one pound lighter in weight, a few pounds cheaper and more manageable on one's lap. But ruthless pruning for the next edition should not detract anyone from the present edition. This is British medicine at its best and is strongly recommended in the world market of medical textbooks.

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Instructions for Patients, 4th edition, H. Winter Griffith. Pp. xiii + 369. W.B. Saunders, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Sidcup, Kent, 1989. £31.95.

This is not a book as such. It is however a vast tome covering 325 topics from A to X, i.e. from abdominal pain and suspected appendicitis to an X-ray examination questionnaire. This is followed by pages of illustration, e.g. sinus cavities and male genital organs.

Each topic is on a pull-out page which is then photocopied and handed to the patient to read at his leisure, e.g. when enduring the distress of acute pericarditis or when examining the soles of his feet for changes in pigmented areas in malignant melanoma! I cannot imagine many of my patients with suspected appendicitis taking 'rectal temperatures every two hours and keep a record to bring with you at the time of your next appointment', but then this is a book for American doctors and their patients.

It is essentially a teaching aid, but whether it should be taken to such extremes as in this issue is doubtful. To my mind, it cuts across the whole style of the British general practice consultation. This book is no substitute for doctors and patients talking to each other. There are patients who will always look up books to see what is wrong with them but handing out leaflets is not the answer. The difficulty about producing leaflets for patients is in finding the right level of communication. Some of these sheets might help our better