Book Reviews

AIDS — Principles, Practices and Politics, edited by Inge B Corless and Mary Pittman-Lindeman. Pp xvii + 252. Hemisphere Publishing Corporation, Washington (A subsidiary of Harper & Row Publishers Inc., Cambridge, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, London, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Singapore, Sydney, 1989. Cloth £58.00.

This fascinating book is well balanced, unlike some other books with similar titles which have been commandeered by pro-gay activists. HIV facts are stated clearly, as are the past and present reactions of various individuals and groups.

All chapters are interesting and insightful; it is obvious that AIDS is the latest in a long line of epidemics, each of which has elicited moral and political reactions.

One chapter in particular 'The Malignant Metaphor, a Political Anthology of AIDS' (despite its awful title) presents an entertainingly ruthless perspective very different from the traditional 'gloom and doom' approach. AIDS has not killed 20–25 percent of the population (as did Justinian plague). Intravenous addicts ignore their high risk profession as effectively as those who work on scaffolding or undertake free-fall parachuting. Sports medicine is a speciality developed to cater for behaviour induced injury — why treat (or judge) HIV differently? The US sex industry seems to have shown some responsibility towards encouraging safer practices — certainly it has shown far more responsibility than the tobacco industry has ever shown, anywhere.

£58 for 252 pages is wondrously unrealistic. £58 could probably be better spent by individuals or institutions. The publishers must surely be aware that such pricing is an encouragement to photostat some or all of such books — an activity which is both immoral and illegal.

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Autonomic Failure, second edition, edited by Sir Roger Bannister. Pp.xv + 783. Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, Tokyo, 1989. £30.00.

This is a big book by any standards — weighing over 4 lb by my consulting room scales, and running to 780 pages. It is therefore not meant to be read as a general review of the subject of autonomic failure; but, as a reference work, it is invaluable. The first edition was published in 1983 and this second edition up-dates the subject including much new material on neurotransmitter function, imaging, evoked potential recording and other electrophysiological techniques.

Forty-two chapters are contributed by fifty-four authors but there is evidence of a firm editorial hand since there is remarkably little overlap between chapters. Sir Roger Bannister has contributed a number of key chapters including those on classification of autonomic failure, its clinical features, and investigations and management of postural hypotension. The scope of the book is wide and it provides a comprehensive review of all subjects related to autonomic failure.

In Part I the initial chapters are concerned with the structure and function of the autonomic nervous system, but although this part of the book deals with the more basic scientific aspects of the subject, their relevance to clinical medicine tends to be kept firmly in mind.

In Part II these clinical and pathophysiological problems are looked at in detail. The clinical consequences of autonomic failure are discussed and chapters are devoted to sleep apnoea, bladder and sexual dysfunction and the commoner disease states causing autonomic failure.

Finally, the third part of the book adds specific chapters on other diseases associated with autonomic failure — peripheral neuropathy, diabetes, alcohol and porphyria. There are also chapters on pain and sweating and the autonomic nervous system.

Throughout, the aim is to provide the clinician with information relevant to medical practice. Cardiologists, neurologists, geriatricians and general physicians will all find this a useful source of information. At £30.00 its price is modest by modern day standards but most will prefer to have access through their library rather than owning a copy themselves.

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Hutchinson's Clinical Methods, Michael Swash. Pp. xi + 618. Baillière Tindall, London, Philadelphia, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, 1989. £7.95.

This book first appeared over 90 years ago and has been one of the 'Standards' for clinical students ever since. It sets out to instruct in the methods of gathering clinical information, covering the history and physical examination, which now includes gynaecological and obstetric techniques, useful chapters on examination of children, the unconscious patient and sexually transmitted diseases, together with an over view of techniques for the special investigation of each system.

It is perhaps at its weakest in its coverage of these further investigations, not because of inadequate detail — an in-depth appraisal of every possible diagnostic test is not the purpose of such a book — but because of inappropriate emphasis which might mislead the student. For example, to a gastroenterologist it is strange to see several pages devoted to the examination of the faeces, including a large table on amoebiasis but no mention of intestinal overgrowth or any of the various breath tests used in gastroenterology. There is mention of something called the 'triple test' but not of tubeless tests of pancreatic function. Likewise, should a book aimed at '... students of all ages and all degrees of experience', be showing a succession of colour plates of blood films, marrow smears and cytology preparations whilst relegating pictures of urine microscopy, surely of more practical relevance, to the low-quality black and white images of the cheap text paper?

Most of the book is a pleasure to read, although the flow of the chapter on the cardiovascular system is interrupted by a set of intrusive and (to this reviewer) mind-numbing diagrams of haemodynamics, phono- and echo-cardiograms. Clinical details for the novice, such as what the common