Book Reviews

The Characteristics of Aphasia, edited by Chris Code. Pp. xii + 212, illustrated. Taylor and Francis, London, New York, Philadelphia, 1989. £12.00 (paperback).

Aphasiology has moved a long way in the last 20 years. The descriptive terminology learnt as a medical student is no longer helpful through years of clinical practice in understanding the problems of the dysphasic patient. From the standpoint of the non-neuropsychologist the aphasia literature has become top heavy with incomprehensible reading matter. *The Characteristics of Aphasia* is a welcome, understandable and concise volume which redresses the balance and gives a broad view of current thinking about language disorders and their mechanisms. 'Symptoms, Syndromes and Models: the Nature of Aphasia' should be essential reading for all approaching the MRCP examination in that it provides a balanced account of theories of language disorder including classical and neoclassical theories and that of Luria. The chapters on fluency, word naming and auditory verbal comprehension give a historical, clinical and linguistic approach, including some of their limitations, to classical components of aphasia which were first highlighted over 100 years ago by Broca and Pierre Marie. There are also useful sections about some of the treatments currently available. Theories of the mechanisms of agrammatism, paragrammatism, paraphasia and jargonaphasia are approached from a psycholinguistic angle but the discussion is such as to be comprehensible to a physician. The chapter on the often missed syndrome of speech apraxia includes a helpful review of the language–speech argument, ending up in favour of the latter. There is a fascinating review of the subject of speech automatisms and recurring utterances which at last brings to the clinician's attention the vital role of the right hemisphere in language production. A physician may find the final chapter on acquired disorders of reading and spelling, written from the neuropsychological viewpoint, the most technical, but this in no way detracts from a fine collection of essays.

This book satisfies the aims of the Series Editors; it brings together concepts of classical neurology and neuropsychology in an understandable way and any career neurologist would do well to read it, as would anybody else with an interest in language, its genesis and its disorders.

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Handbook of Emergencies in General Practice, Norman Lawrence & Joanna Watts. Oxford Medical Publications, Oxford, 1989. £14.95 (paperback).

The stated aim of the authors of this book is to provide essential information for front-line doctors required to make prompt decisions about emergency care. The book has washable soft covers and is of a size suitable for fitting into one's pocket. Every alternate page is blank allowing

the owner to add his own notes and information alongside the authors' proposed management.

The book begins with the management of ophthalmic emergencies and works through the various systems of the body. It includes excellent chapters on the management of child abuse, rape, terminal care and how to respond in a case of sudden death (if you practise in England or Wales). Each condition is dealt with in a similar way with a description of symptoms and signs followed by possible differential diagnosis and then immediate treatment. Where necessary follow-up treatment is included. Advice about whether referral to hospital is necessary is also given. It is in this area of possible referral to hospital that some may take exception to the authors' advice. They are obviously used to working in an area where specialist hospital care and other specialized agencies are readily available. Practitioners in remote rural areas may be more willing to hold a watching brief over their patients' condition before sending them on a long return journey for hospital advice. The book has apparently been trial tested in general practice over a period of 4 months and found to provide adequate and helpful information on all the various emergencies that presented during that time. Both trainee and recently trained general practitioners will find this book readable and useful; and I am quite sure that well thumbed dog-eared copies will soon be seen sticking out from their coat pockets.

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Medical Libraries: a User Guide. Pp. viii + 110, illustrated. British Medical Association, London, 1987. £6.95 (includes post and packing).

Libraries on first acquaintance can seem baffling places apparently run for the benefit of the library staff but this book successfully demonstrates that this is not the case and that the educational and information needs of the user take priority.

The features common to most medical libraries are explained in detail with good examples of how catalogues and indexes work. The range of literature of potential interest to clinicians and researchers is described and a large number of the indexing and abstracting services which try to provide a key to the complex field of biomedical information are covered. Perhaps more could have been included on sources of statistical information and official publications generally but this field needs, and already has, more than one book devoted exclusively to it. I would also have liked more on medical history and biography but 'How to use a Medical Library' by L.T. Morton covers the field well.

Although many examples are based on BMA library practice and there are a few plugs for BMA services the book gives a good overview of medical information sources and how to use them in a library context.

There is a useful chapter on technology in the library where the range of machinery (and information formats) a user is likely to encounter is explained with excellent diagrams.