Paediatrics, R. Thomas and D. Harvey. Pp. 157, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, New York, Tokyo, 1992. Paperback £7.95.

Books containing useful paediatric photographs are all too scarce at the present time. The larger atlases are expensive, unwieldy, and tend to reside only in library departments.

This is a small, affordable book containing 210 colour photographs, arranged in systems orientated chapters. By avoiding the more esoteric syndromes and rarer conditions the most common and important disorders are well covered. Discussions on each topic are brief, but accurate and refreshingly up to date. Photographs are used well to convey vital clinical information. The book begins with a useful section on developmental paediatrics followed by a wide range of topics ranging from Kawasaki Disease to non-accidental injury.

This book is aimed mainly at medical students, and should be a compulsory purchase during paediatric attachments and before final exams. It lacks detail for any of the higher paediatric exams, but would still be a welcome addition to most general paediatric wards.

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Blood Coagulation and Haemostasis: A Practical Guide, fourth edition, edited by J.M. Thomson. Pp. 292, not illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, New York, Melbourne, Tokyo, 1991. Hardback £50.00.

This is the fourth edition of the series and reflects the new interests in the field of haemostasis, particularly thrombophilia and the inhibitors of coagulation. Thus the introductory chapter is devoted to familial thrombophilia, those congenital conditions characterized by a deficiency of a coagulation inhibitor and clinically by recurrent thromboses. Subsequent chapters deal with the laboratory diagnoses of proteins C and S and the lupus anticoagulant. There is also a detailed and fascinating chapter on the molecular pathology of antithrombin III.

Amongst other contributions are two practical reviews on the laboratory aspects of thrombolytic therapy and the investigation of the infant with impaired haemostasis. A further chapter discusses how new monoclonal assays of fibrinogen derivatives may avoid venography in suspected venous thrombosis. The book concludes with a chapter by the editor on the problems of standardization of the prothrombin time.

All the contributions to the book are clear and comprehensive and contain much technical detail. I would wholeheartedly recommend its purchase by each haematology laboratory. On the other hand, the non-specialist wanting an introduction to haemostasis will be disappointed; there is a great deal of technical laboratory detail and the book is by no means a comprehensive text book as one might suspect from a glance at the cover. (Perhaps, 'Some Recent Advances in Haemostasis' might be a more suitable title.)

The book illustrates the rapid progress in this field and at least confirms to the present reviewer that, though assays for many inhibitors are available to the general laboratory, progress will only continue, if we refer the unusual cases for refinement of diagnosis to the specialized laboratories of the experts, such as those who have contributed to this useful volume.

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Advances in Pineal Research, edited by A. Foldes and R.J. Reiter. Pp. viii + 286, illustrated. John Libbey, London, Paris, Rome, 1991. Hardback £32.50.

The pineal has long been the bane of endocrinologists: an organ in the midline of the brain, long suspected of having vital and controlling functions, but with no known function in the human either physiologically or pathologically. The situation was rendered even worse by the fact that the pineal becomes increasingly calcified, and presumably even less functional, with increasing age. Nevertheless, this has not inhibited the growth of a vast industry of animal research into the pathophysiology of the pineal, which has been shown to play a vital and fascinating role in reproductive processes. Light-sensitive pathways outside of the classical route relay information through the superior cervical ganglia directly to the pineal, which transforms the neural signal into hormonal release, probably melatonin but possibly including a variety of other substances. This system is vital in entraining light-dark rhythms to behaviour, and in particular to reproductive processes as seen in seasonally breeding animals. Research continues rapidly in this area, not least because of the economic importance in possibly extending breeding seasons in domesticated animals bred for food. To get a flavour of the current research in this area one could do no worse than dipping into the current volume, which is both well-presented and bound, in spite of being produced in camera-ready format. The volume is also remarkably cheap compared to other proceedings, this being the summaries of papers presented at an International Symposium on Pineal Hormones held in New South Wales, Australia, in the summer of 1991. The publishers and editors are to be commended on the speed of publication and the elegance of the volume produced. And yet, and yet... one remains very hard put to perceive the relevance of this research to contemporary clinical medicine. Notwithstanding straws in the wind of the jet stream of international flights, with exciting but tentative data on jet lag, the function of the human pineal remains as unclear in 1993 as it was to Descartes. Perhaps next year the pineal will give up its secrets, but not yet.

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