Book reviews

Atrial fibrillation

ABC of atrial fibrillation, GYH Lip, ed. pp viii+36, illustrated. BMJ Publishing Group, London, 1996. £10.95, paperback

This useful assembly of facts about atrial fibrillation draws welcome attention to a common and important clinical problem. Attractive presentation and format assist the reader. Key pieces of information are displayed in panels alongside the text.

The text would benefit from editing to eliminate repetition, condense the prose, remove minor errors and make the text and panels more consistent and specific. The illustrations are colourful but do not all correspond precisely to their legends. Recognition of irregular tachycardias, particularly sinus rhythm with extrasystoles and multifocal atrial tachycardia, both easily mistaken for atrial fibrillation, deserves more emphasis. The distinction between drug control of ventricular rate in persistent atrial fibrillation and drug prevention of paroxysmal atrial fibrillation needs to be kept clearer throughout the section on drugs and treatment. Although 10 years old, surgical treatment is still largely of experimental interest rather than of clinical value. It could, perhaps be replaced by discussion of catheter modification of the posterior aspect of the atrioventricular node for ventricular rate control. The use of beta blockade gets scant mention and there is no discussion of the influence, if any, of anti-arrhythmic pre-medication on the efficacy of DC cardioversion and subsequent maintenance of sinus rhythm. The anti-coagulant section is comprehensive and up to date, but the units of risk and incidence in the tables and histograms are confused. Economic factors are briefly mentioned but the cost effectiveness and benefit of prophylactic drug treatment, monitoring treatment, non-drug treatment and the consequences of stroke are not addressed.

A HARLEY
The Cardiothoracic Centre,
Liverpool L14 3PE, UK

Ischaemia

Ischaemia: preconditioning and adaptation, MS Marber, DM Yellon. pp xv+236. Bros, Oxford, 1966. Hardback

There has been a considerable volume of scientific work on the subject of ischaemic preconditioning and adaptation and this has been well condensed into this eminently readable tone. The editors have gathered a group of contributors from principally the US and Europe, all of whom are experts in the field, and each of the chapters is an excellent overview of individual subjects, thus the wide appeal both to basic scientists working in the area and clinicians treating patients with ischaemic heart disease.

The chapters are well structured and the contents list designed so specific areas can be examined without delay, and there is a useful list of abbreviations for those not well versed in the vernacular of ischaemic preconditioning. Many chapters contain a useful conclusion or summary, and all are excellently

referenced with well-balanced references giving the reader a window into the scientific and clinical studies that have been carried out in relevant areas.

While there is clearly an emphasis on the relevant biochemistry, particularly in the first half of the book, the arguments are developed in such a way as to be easily understood by the clinical community and conversely, the clinical data towards the end of the book will still be of great relevance to basic scientists. From the clinician's point of view, there are particularly good chapters on preconditioning during revascularisation and in patients with angina, and on preconditioning as a protector against arrhythmogenesis.

While primarily intended for experimental and clinical cardiologists, this volume could find its way on to the shelves of most medical libraries and would be of interest to general physicians dealing with ischaemic patients also. The price, however, is a little high for individuals other than those with a specific interest in the area.

RA PERRY
The Cardiothoracic Centre,
Liverpool L14 3PE, UK

Stroke

Stroke. A practical guide to management, CP Wardlaw *et al.* pp vii+66, illustrated. Blackwell Science Ltd, Oxford, 1996. £99.50, hardback

This book differs from most others on stroke as it is intended to be a practical guide to management. It is written by a group who are both eminent in the field of stroke research and experienced in the practical day-to-day management of stroke patients. Over the last few decades measures aimed at preventing stroke have progressed enormously and this book reviews all the important advances, both medical and surgical. It also highlights areas in which knowledge is deficient. As would be expected of a team led by the Edinburgh group, it is rigorous in its analysis of good and bad trials; the reader is left in no doubt as to what data are reliable (ie, evidence based) and what is perhaps 'fashion'. The text is easy to read and is aimed not only at doctors but also at therapists and nurses.

The book follows a logical order from diagnosis, type and site of stroke, pathogenesis, and treatment, to prevention of further attacks. It also includes a chapter on unusual causes of stroke, a detailed discussion about those aspects usually left to the physiotherapist and occupational therapist, and a section on the organisation of stroke services.

The authors will not be surprised that the reviewer disagrees with the statement that conventional angiography is still considered mandatory before carotid endarterectomy; Doppler duplex ultrasound and magnetic resonance angiography, in appropriate hands, are all that is needed in the work up for carotid endarterectomy.

The authors are to be forgiven for the fact that two CT scans are upside down; it seems almost churlish to mention this.

This book is a 'Which? Best Buy' for all those interested in the day-to-day care of

stroke. It is a clinical masterpiece and this reviewer will treasure his copy.

P HUMPHREY
The Walton Centre for Neurology &
Neurosurgery
Liverpool L9 1AE, UK

Cancer

Cancer and the adolescent, P Selby, C Bailey, eds. pp xii+298, illustrated. BMJ Publishing Group, London, 1996. £29.95 paperback

Cancer services for children are generally well organised, most children being treated in Regional specialist paediatric oncology centres. Adolescents have been less well served, but there is now an increased awareness of their particular needs. This book follows from the First International Conference on Cancer and the Adolescent held in Leeds in 1994. The editors have brought together an international group of authors who have an interest in the interface between children and adults, covering a wide range of topics.

The initial useful section on epidemiology illustrates the lack of any consistent definition of adolescence. The age appears to vary from 10 years, surely too young, and 24 years, when patients are clearly adults. Information obtained from patients themselves suggests 13 to 19 years, but the age of admission to an adolescent facility should always be flexible and take into account the individual patient's wishes and needs.

The chapters on clinical features are well written and up to date; those on interacting with teenagers and the adolescent views of the impact of treatment are especially valuable. Information on the management of thyroid cancer, one of the commonest malignancies in adolescent girls, is strangely absent. The final chapter relates to the experiences of the Middlesex Hospital unit and should be read by anyone considering providing care for adolescents.

This book is to be recommended to all involved in the management of teenagers with cancer.

J MARTIN
Department of Paediatric Oncology, Alder Hey
Children's Hospital, Liverpool L12 2AP, UK

Poikilothermia in man

Pathophysiological aspects and clinical implications, MA MacKenzie. pp 204, illustrated. Nijmegen University Press, Nijmegen, 1996. Paperback

This book is apparently based on a thesis, and consists of an introduction, a collection of papers and a summary in English and Dutch. It reports in detail studies on four patients who showed unusually labile body temperatures.

The reliability of the findings reported is often difficult to assess, since the small number of patients raises questions about the statistical comparisons with the four controls, and results for the controls are

generally not given in the same detail for the controls as for the patients. The book is therefore largely for the specialist.

Its merit is that a substantial number of measurements reported have previously been made, seldom or not at all, in such patients, who are rare. It will accordingly be a useful reference for anyone treating, or planning studies on, patients with thermoregulatory failure. It will be particularly useful to anyone interested in the changes that take place in a range of physiological parameters as body temperature changes. For such studies the patients described in this book acted as their own controls during experimental raising and lowering of their body temperature. The measurements reported during these include changes in evoked potentials and EEG, as body temperature was changed between normal or high levels, and mild hypothermia (33°C). A number of the changes reported invite further study. The opening review is wider-ranging than is conventional nowadays, and provides some interesting general reading on varied thermoregulatory topics.

WR KEATINGE

*Department of Physiology
Queen Mary & Westfield College,
University of London, London E1 4NS, UK*

Perinatology

Pediatricians & perinatology: the scientific basis, 2nd edn. D Gluckman, MA Heymann, eds. pp xvi+992. illustrated. Arnold, London, 1996. £95.00 hardback.

On the face of it, this book would not be high on the wish-list of practising clinicians, being dedicated to the underlying scientific principles rather than clinical practice. There is a minimal amount of information therefore on clinical intervention. However, as an educational tool the book comes into its own. With the increased commitment to postgraduate education and the development of more integrated undergraduate medical curricula, together with the courses in the paramedical professions, the practising paediatrician is likely to be asked to prepare teaching material on many aspects of paediatrics, perhaps with little previous exposure to some aspects. For example, I have just been preparing a postgraduate lecture on postnatal growth in preterm babies and a number of chapters provided useful information and different insights. Even for more research-minded clinicians there is a wealth of information which can give a grounding in areas relating to one's main area of interest. The book would also be useful when choosing and preparing more esoteric articles for journal clubs.

The book is wide ranging and contains 96 chapters at about 10 pages per chapter. The articles are concise and well laid-out with plenty of sub-headings – so it is easy to dip in and get information quickly. The articles contain brief reading lists and are not formally referenced, typical of such reference books. This means that if one wishes to explore the principles in a bit more detail, a literature

search will be required. Do not overlook this book when stocking the shelves of your postgraduate centre.

STEVEN RYAN

*Institute of Child Health,
Alder Hey Children's Hospital,
Liverpool L12 2AP, UK*

Tuberculosis

Trial by TB: A study into current attempts to control the international upsurge in tuberculosis, CI Holme. pp 53, illustrated. Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, 1997. £5.00, paperback

In 1982 Koch identified the Magic Dragon (*Mycobacterium tuberculosis*), following which Thomas Mann described its partial control on the Magic Mountain (sanatoria) and Waksmann and others treated it with Magic Bullets (antituberculous chemotherapy). Sir John Crofton in Edinburgh forecast control of the disease world-wide by the end of this century but tuberculosis has emerged as the greatest current health threat yet as a result of demographic change, HIV infection and international neglect by the West. Indeed it is anticipated that more people will die of the disease in 1997 than in any other year in history.

This brutal story is told in a short, well-illustrated, and referenced supplement to the proceedings of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh by Christopher Holme, a journalist who writes for the Glasgow Herald. The author will not be well known to an Edinburgh readership, let alone a British or international one, but does not pull his punches in attributing blame for the current state of affairs. Holme researched his subject whilst a Reuter foundation fellow at Green College, Oxford. The work is dedicated to the many Edinburgh physicians who have contributed to the control of tuberculosis such as Sir Robert Phillip, who opened the first ever out-patient dispensary, and especially the late Gordon Leitch, who tragically died last year as a result, not of tuberculosis but of drowning.

The proceedings were published on World TB Day organised by the WHO and the International Union against TB and Lung Disease. All doctors, politicians and health managers should read this analytical, well-written monograph to appreciate what they may potentially influence.

C EVANS

*The Cardiothoracic Centre,
Liverpool L18 3PF, UK*

Neonatal medicine

Neonatal formulary. The northern neonatal network, pp xxviii+199 illustrated. BMJ Publishing Group, London, 1996. £17.95 paperback

This book is based on the formulary developed and used by neonatal units in the northern region. It is up-to-date and received wisdom is appropriately challenged

in places. This formulary is based on around 160 'monographs' which include those on *bona fide* drugs but also some on milk formulae and immunisations. Commonly used drugs are obviously included but so too are the infrequently used ones which always seem to need prescribing at 3 am! Each monograph gives a concise summary of the use of the item in neonates and as such is a welcome addition to the library of formularies. The British National Formulary is particularly devoid of information on treating neonates and the Alder Hey Book of Children's Doses (ABCD) is really just what it says. This book, in providing background information, should improve prescribing by educating. The information is concisely presented, giving a rapid opinion which can be easily digested – even in the middle of the night. For instance, the section on fluconazole gives advice on the diagnosis of yeast infections. A welcome section on oxygen therapy is included. Maternal drugs are also listed where they may have an important effect on the infant following placental transfer. A few general references are given for each monograph.

This book should provide a basic template with which a neonatal unit can examine their prescribing practice. I hope it is updated regularly.

S RYAN

*Institute of Child Health
Department of Child Health
Alder Hey Children's Hospital,
Liverpool L12 2AP, UK*

Clinical medicine

250 Short cases in clinical medicine, 2nd edn. R Baliga. pp xvi+638. WB Saunders, London, 1996. £15.95, paperback

This text updates the 1993 edition of a popular book used by both medical students preparing for finals and candidates about to take the clinical part of MRCP (UK) exam. The goal of the book is to provide strategies to satisfy the requirements of a clinical examination in general internal medicine. A good background knowledge in general medicine is essential.

The book covers each of the major systems beginning with the general examination, then covering commonly seen relevant short cases. Possible questions encountered in clinical examinations are then reviewed. Basic questions are covered initially to a standard required by all medical students. For the more advanced, questions and answers are considered for the postgraduate. Ideally, the candidate should examine the patient then review the relevant section in the text.

The book is well ordered, well written and easy to read. Any person preparing for the aforementioned examinations should consider purchasing it.

M LEDSON

*The Cardiothoracic Centre
Liverpool L14 3PE, UK*