

Book Reviews

Advances in Nephrology from the Necker Hospital, Volume 13, 1984. Edited by Jean-Francois Bach, Jean Crosnier, Jean-Louis Funck-Brentano, Jean-Pierre Grünfeld, Morton H. Maxwell. Pp. xxiii + 383, illustrated. Year Book Medical Publishers, Chicago, 1984. £55.50.

This is the latest in a distinguished series of reviews based on the Necker Hospital's justifiably famous annual nephrology update. However, it is difficult to recommend this volume unreservedly as for a variety of reasons it fails to match many previous volumes in the series. It has fallen into the trap of many conference proceedings in committing every review to print, irrespective of content. Three chapters come into that category, relating to the strategies of selecting various forms of renal replacement therapy and the results of renal replacement therapy in individual units. They add nothing to what has not been said elsewhere many times and will be familiar ground to all nephrologists. Of the remaining 15 chapters, seven are partly or wholly devoted to some aspect of anti-diuretic hormone physiology, and probably provide within a single volume the best state of the art review on this topic currently available. However, there is considerable overlap between these chapters and a stronger editorial hand in the final written manuscript would have been useful.

That leaves a miscellany of eight other topics for the remaining chapters. These include a comprehensive and readable review of thrombosis in nephrotic syndrome and an interesting article about granulomatous interstitial nephritis. The remaining chapters unfortunately cover topics which have been adequately reviewed in other publications elsewhere and while eminently suitable for inclusion in a symposium, appear in print as the now familiar review of other reviews.

A final infuriating aspect of the book is its organisation. Several chapters would fit quite happily in sequence, but instead are scattered throughout the book, the chosen order being devoid of any discernible logic.

At £55.50 for less than 400 pages this is an expensive way of buying perhaps half a dozen useful review articles. If this respected series is not to grind to a halt, radical change in editorial policy would seem to be necessary.

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From Neuron to Brain: A Cellular Approach to the Function of the Nervous System, Second edition. Stephen W. Kuffler, John G. Nicholls and A. Robert Martin. Pp. xix + 651, illustrated. Sinauer Associates, Sunderland, Massachusetts, 1984. £14.80.

This excellent book, now deservedly in its second edition, achieves admirably its intentions of delivering the nuts and bolts of neurobiology palatably. It is dedicated to Steven Kuffler, the senior contributor to the first edition, who tragically died during the writing. A brief obituary is included, but the importance of his wide ranging contribution to neuroscience can be seen scattered throughout the pages of the book. The volume moves from the analysis of nerve signals through mechanisms for signal production and transformation of neural information to explanations of the higher integrative mechanisms of the nervous system, weaving a rich and vivid tapestry which befits a contemporary description of Sherrington's Enchanted Loom. The book has a first-rate glossary, a valuable bibliography and useful appendices dealing with electrical circuitry and points of neuro-anatomical difficulty.

There is much of relevance for the clinician here, with new sections on neuro-peptides, demyelination and re-myelination mechanisms, the development of monoclonal antibodies to neural components and transplantation techniques in the central nervous system. This new edition uses more 'boxes' to highlight important concepts and there is a lavish supply of technical figures and daguerreotypes depicting the great men of neuro-biology. The book is set in Palatino, a face inspired by the typography of the Italian Renaissance which is pleasing to the eye and seems to aid the digestion of complicated concepts.

I suspect this volume will sell best to enquiring undergraduates, but it would also prove useful to all those neurologists and neurosurgeons who would like to consider themselves as clinical scientists.

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Hospital paediatrics, Anthony D. Milner and David Hull. Pp. viii + 412, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1984. £24.00.