

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.

This book, written almost exclusively by members of the local department, is the second major paediatric text book to come out of Professor Hull's Nottingham stable, and is designed as the 'blurb' says to 'help residents manage the problems they are likely to meet in hospital.'

To help fulfil this aim the authors, while splitting the book up into system-orientated chapters, have adopted a problem-orientated approach, so that a topic is covered in a way that is logical for a resident confronted with a wheezy febrile coughing child or a child having funny turns.

To be concise, the authors have been extremely successful; the book is clear, well written with extensive and skilful use of diagrams and tables, though I found the miniaturised X-rays, even with explanatory line diagrams, rather unhelpful. There are deficiencies. I thought the section on infectious diseases was poor and confusing. The resident would not know how to diagnose meningitis on the CSF, the descriptions of the exanthems are muddled up and the table on immunisations is just plonked down in the middle of the chapter without any explanation. The authors have presumably made an arbitrary decision about what does not constitute hospital paediatrics, hence the absence of what to do with a baby with a cold, colic, fissure-in-ano or worms, yet it was just these conditions that I desperately needed help with as a paediatric S.H.O. when they cropped up in much more fascinating conditions (covered in the text) such as ataxia, telangiectasia or Zollinger-Ellison syndrome. Hypertension in childhood is not covered. It is sad to see the authors recommend the useless technique for cardiac massage in the neonate, the dose of bicarbonate recommended on p.360 is only just above homeopathic, and lowering incubator temperatures in babies with apnoeic attacks may be safe in Nottingham where they understand heat balance in neonates, but elsewhere it could be lethal. There are many spelling mistakes, some diagrams are incorrectly labelled – dangerously on p. 24, and the child on p. 127 being examined to exclude pyloric stenosis presumably has situs inversus!

These criticisms are, however, little more than nit picking. The book could be improved by inclusion of a short pharmacopoeia and the telephone numbers of the Poison Centres in the UK, but it is, without doubt, the best short text book of paediatrics available. No paediatric ward or resident should be without a copy.

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Key Facts in Embryology, M.W. Rana. Pp. 245, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, New York, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, 1984. £14.75.

An interesting information packed book, a mixture of the excellent, up to date, and pure schoolboy howlers. The aorta does not arise from the left atrium neither does the pulmonary artery come from the right atrium (Figure 12–9, 12–10). Many of the diagrams show an irritating lack of elementary drawing techniques. The legends show a lack of the most elementary Greek and Latin grammar and spelling. Mixing up of the legends and labelling for example Figure 12–15 or leaving out letters as in Figure 16–6 illustrates the poor level of proof reading. The editor has been thanked in the preface, but things have gone wrong in the supervision of the book.

These things having been said it is a good book, useful as a rapid reference for salient points. Anyone knowing its contents will have a sound and fundamental knowledge of classical human embryology.

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Respiratory Disorders, John Fry, Roger White & Michael Whitfield. Library of General Practice. Vol. 8. Pp. 186, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1984. £12.00.

This clearly written but somewhat sparse volume is the 8th book in a well established series covering topics ranging from hypertension to sexual medicine.

There are three authors, two general practitioners and a consultant physician specialising in general medicine and respiratory disease.

It begins with a description of the functions and structure of the respiratory tract following this with a brief account of the epidemiology and investigation of respiratory diseases in the community. The individual conditions are then described in more detail, and I particularly enjoyed the chapter on asthma.

The authors advocate the sensible approach of educating the patient to understand more about the natural history of acute respiratory infections and the limitations of therapeutic intervention. For example they state: 'antibiotics should play a very small part in the management of URIs.' This theme and the