BOOK REVIEWS


This short book covers 11 diverse topics in endocrinology which may be difficult to disguise and have varying Management strategies.

Each chapter has a section of text followed by an algorithm and is written by an expert in that particular field. There is something of interest for the Physician, Paediatrician and Gynaecologist with topics as diverse as hypercalcaemia, short stature and infertility being covered.

Each chapter taken individually is informative and easily understandable, particularly the text. Personally I dislike algorithms as their step-wise decision making is artificial and not representative of clinical practice.

This is a difficult book to recommend as its contents are too diverse and haphazard. If detailed information is required it is to be found in greater depth in a reference book appropriate to the specialty, and the topics covered in the chapters are too narrow to provide an overview of any one area of endocrinology.

D G SINCLAIR


Is a 490 page volume a Handbook? I wondered why this group of authors (who include an Attending Addictionologist!) should feel obliged to add yet another volume on this subject. It certainly adds nothing new to the old formula of 'dry them out and send them to A.A.' (or N.A.) In attempting to cover this whole field historically and scientifically as well as therapeutically, it does none of these – at repetitious length.

300 pages are devoted to Alcohol, but say little more than the 46 page booklet produced by the Medical Council on Alcohol, and less than any of the recent Royal Colleges' reports.

I cannot recommend this muddled, vague and repetitive book.

S M BLUNDEN


Approximately 45,000 individuals go trekking in Nepal each year. Many others visit adjacent Himalayan areas in India, Pakistan and Bhutan. East Africa (Mount Kenya and Mount Kilimanjaro) and South America offer mountain ranges which combine significant altitude with rapid accessibility from sea level. Nearer to home, in the European Alps, heights over 3,000 metres are readily attainable by many people every year.

Therefore more and more physicians will be seeing more and more individuals with altitude related illnesses, or more significantly will be advising individuals upon how to avoid such problems.

This book is therefore published at an opportune moment and is a "tour de force" in mountain medicine and physiology. Its predecessor was "Mountaineering Medicine" by Michael Ward (one of the current authors); my own edition is 15 years old and is badly in need of replacement.

This new book is a masterly review of clinical and scientific aspects of altitude adaptation, written by authors whose contribution to the original literature of this subject has been outstanding over the last 25 years.

Opening chapters deal with the history of altitude medicine and relevant aspects of physics and geography. These are followed by detailed surveys on how the body undergoes physiological adaptation to altitude. There are the expected chapters on respiratory responses and hypoxia but also reviews of problems with sleep and nutrition which might be less expected.

The book then turns to the more clinical aspects of altitude with reviews of mountain sickness and cold injury problems, before ending with an excellent chapter on field studies which is full of practical tips.

Each individual chapter is short with numerous subheadings, so required information can be readily found. Each chapter, despite its brevity, may have up to 25 references and this adds to the undoubted authority of this book. There is a comprehensive index.

Although this is primarily a book of reference, it is very well written and actually very enjoyable to read.

It should be freely available in all Service medical libraries and should be eagerly read by any medical officer who is intending to "go high" or treat and advise those "going high".

A R O MILLER


This book has been produced by one of the younger Consultants at Queen Charlotte's Hospital, who has persuaded 55 contributors to produce 41 short chapters in a remarkably uniform and concise manner. The authority this book carries stems from their vast range of experience in this complex and diverse subject.

The book starts with a section on the normal physiological responses of the placenta and fetus, on which the subsequent interpretation of results depends.

It is the only part of the book where the problems of multi-author books are apparent, as some of the Americanisms used make reading difficult.

The next section deals with methods of assessing fetal
well-being, and diversifies from the detection of hypoxia and acidosis into fetal anomalies. The subsequent section deals critically with the different uses of antepartum monitoring. The next two sections deal with the methods and uses of intrapartum monitoring, ending with a chapter on the medico-legal aspects of fetal monitoring.

Each chapter follows a similar format and can be read on its own, though this does lead to a moderate amount of repetition. They all question the currently accepted 'faith' of fetal monitoring with the aim of putting it into a more appropriate context. In consequence there are few didactic statements, but those that have crept in (such as the need for a third-trimester scan if the 16 week scan shows a low-lying placenta) should not be accepted uncritically.

The print is easy to read with few typographical errors and the figures and tables (with the exception of one ultrasound picture) are clear.

Prof Beard introduces the book as one which should be read by all aspiring obstetricians – I suggest it should also be bought and read by all practising obstetricians. It will be worth the effort and expense.

I J PAGE


These slim (50-60 pages) WHO Technical Reports are produced annually. Previous editions have (1985) reviewed phenethylamines and (1987) barbiturates. The current volume reviews selected hypnotics, opioid agonist-antagonists and a few other drugs. The abuse potential is weighed against the therapeutic usefulness, and scheduling, or even removal from manufacture is recommended. This 1989 report recommends cessation of manufacture of methaqualone worldwide. It is also interesting in that it records the considerable abuse of buprenorphine (Temgesic) and places it under the convention of psychotropic substances. Though not exactly gripping reading, these reports are short and should serve to alert doctors in many differing fields in the changing patterns of, and potential for abuse of, substances they may prescribe.

S M BLUNDEN


In this book the author sets out to remove the mystique surrounding endotracheal intubation. It is aimed at medical students, nurses, para-medical personnel and trainee anaesthetists, and I wondered at first if a whole book on this subject might be off-putting to such a readership. Don’t be put off; there is a lot here for those in training and even the experienced will pick up useful tips. The illustrations are clear line-drawings which achieve their purpose of amplifying the text. I liked the stress on a logical progression – examination and preparation before intubation and the emphasis that “ventilation is more important than intubation”. Anyone who follows the precepts laid down here will be safe to let loose on patients.

The book is short and easy to read, with clear print and commendably free from printing errors. It is an American production so spelling and nomenclature are slightly different from British practice but this is not obtrusive. References include recent work and are to both Transatlantic and European literature. The sizes of endotracheal tube recommended seem rather small, but perhaps this is a fault in the right direction. I would, however, like to see a more comprehensive index. Tracheostomy and crico-thyroidotomy (but not mini-tracheostomy) are mentioned in the text, though their detailed description is outside the scope of this book; they are however not present in the index.

Overall, the author has succeeded in her aim of demystifying intubation for the non-expert, and her commonsense advice to those in less than ideal surroundings will be useful to Anaesthetic Support and Resuscitation Officers (ASRO) and other medical personnel whose role requires them to become familiar with airway management.

I would recommend this book to all Anaesthetic departments with trainees and I shall be chaining up my personal copy!

H B HANNAH


This is a concise well written book of 34 pages in A4 format which gives a clear understanding of the essentials of asthma and its management.

Of particular value is the chapter on General Management which includes a section on assessing severity and where to treat acute asthma (i.e. when to admit to hospital). The authors state quite reasonably that it is not possible to lay down strict criteria for admission to hospital, but make the point that death from asthma occur when the patient or doctor has failed to appreciate the severity of the attack, which is perhaps the books most important message.

Other chapters contain information on making the diagnosis, basic pathophysiology and pharmacology, the section devoted to asthma in children being particularly useful.

There is also a wealth of practical advice on management and common pit falls to avoid.

At £4.95 this book represents excellent value and I would strongly recommend it to anyone involved in the management of patients with asthma.

D SINCLAIR

Somewhere someone has said that Memoirs are the only sort of books worth writing.

Whether the reader has reservations about this generalisation or not, here is a book, the latest in the series of the Memoir Club published by the British Medical Journal, which is worthy of his attention. It is the autobiography of Thomas Douglas Victor Swinscow, doctor of medicine, medical journalist, botanist and above all else a philosopher who has been searching and seeking for the ‘Holy Grail’ – the mystery of the universe: “The desire to understand the harmony that I sense in the universe and to discuss aesthetically and logically true relations between things has equally animated me.”

In the pages of this book, classified neatly into parts and sections as befits a lover of taxonomy, the author sets before the reader the multitudinous factors of the complicated formula that has moulded him – “like many people I puzzle over the nature, the existence even of this ‘I’ of which I speak.”

Now in his seventies the author’s span of life extends over a major part of this century which has seen great and beneficial advances in science, communications, technology and equally great but tragic disasters such as World War II – his mentioning inter alia of the Brownie Box Camera, Gamages Store in London and the famous motorcycle trade names of Brough Superior, Triumph, Norton threw me back to my own childhood and adolescence, while on a serious level his references to World War II reminded me of the days of my young adulthood, “few indeed had the prescience and will of Churchill and his adherents to see that the real political issue was not between left and right but between dictatorship and democracy, between bondage and freedom”.

The author was like you and me an RAMC Officer, and within six months of his qualifying as a doctor he found himself on “the Southern Electric on the way to Crookham, the RAMC Depot”, with his RAMC Lieutenant’s uniform in a cardboard box, and a copy of the Tao Te Ching in a bag. This particular section of the book (Part 2, sub-headed To and Fro, Into Africa, Into Holland, Into Norway) describes his wartime military medical experiences. He was at Arnhem – attached to the 1st Airborne Division and survived that holocaust ‘parmis les heureux’. This section is obviously of great interest to us in the Defence Medical Services.

The author is more widely known to the medical profession as the deputy editor of the British Medical Journal, and in the appropriate section of the book he takes us within the precincts of the editorial offices and we are let in on the inside workings of that famous and prestigious medical journal, where we are vicariously introduced to the notable personalities who have made it so internationally famous – Horner, Clegg, Ware, Flack. Of considerable historical interest, especially in view of the proposed present plans for updating the NHS is the story of the birth-pangs of Aneurin Bevan’s National Health Service, that jewel in our welfare state, as interpreted and reported by the editorial staff of the Brit Med J.

To conclude this short and admittedly subjective review I have to say that it is a well-written book as one would expect from a professional journalist, and furthermore I add that it will undoubtedly repay your effort if you but take the trouble to pick this volume up.

Where does the quotation ‘Reap a Destiny’ come from? What are ‘Divagations’? What is a ‘Taoist’? If you do not happen to know the answers don’t just say to yourself ‘Pass’; go ahead and find out.

There’s more to Life than Medicine!!

E E Vella


The arrival in the post of a copy of this book was an example of serendipity since my much used copy of his predecessor, the 1982 reprint of the 1976 edition (also known as Memorandum No 45) had been recently purloined from my office.

The original War Memorandum No 7 ‘Aids to the Investigation of Peripheral Nerve Injuries’ was published in 1943 and was recognised immediately to be of immense practical use to those involved in the treatment of the injured from casualty to rehabilitation stages.

The layout has not changed nor has the advance of electromyography or microsurgery dictated any changes in the information regarding which nerve roots are the predominant conveyors of stimulus to individual muscles. The photographs, which were changed in 1976, because the original blocks were unusable, remain with changes only in those illustrating serratus anterior palsy and are excellent examples. Additionally a diagram of the lumbo-sacral plexus drawn by Patricia Archer has been included as companion to her very clear plan of the brachial plexus.

The Editors, a formidable team under the chairmanship of Sir John Walton, do not discuss trick movements save to affirm that meticulous adherence to the examination methods shown should enable the clinician to avoid being fooled.

In my opinion this book of excellent pedigree will remain a most useful aid to those involved in casualty, surgery and rehabilitation at all levels and is also essential in any physiotherapy department. At £3.50 it is very good value and curiously retains the same ratio of price to house officer’s income that my 1957 edition price 2s.6d. had!

W M Robinson