parents with an IQ in the 70-79 range are "unlikely to provide adequate parenting"; or that if there is wide subtest variability on the Wechsler scales "it can be assumed that such an individual will be found to be grossly ineffective in some aspects of behaviour or judgement"; or that most delinquency occurs "under conditions of socioeconomic deprivation" or that delinquents often show "a subtle neurological impairment". On the other hand, some of the other chapters (such as those on sexual abuse and on the child as a witness) provide useful guidelines. A book of this kind fulfils a much needed role and in some respects this volume serves the purpose very well. However, it is too mixed in quality to give it an unreservedly positive recommendation.

MICHAEL RUTTER

A Manual of Electro-encephalographic Technology. By CD Binnie, AJ Rowan and TH Gutter. (Pp 363; £30 hardback; £11.95 paper.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

At long last, here is another book dealing with all aspects of EEG technology. This book covers all the topics that the standard work "EEG Technology" by Cooper Osselton and Shaw and adds a very useful chapter on the EEG and its clinical use, covering the normal EEG, EEG abnormalities and the uses and abuses of the EEG. I particularly recommend this last section to all medical students and junior doctors, as it settles the question of when an EEG is helpful in the care of a patient.

The layout of the book is excellent, although perhaps Chapter 8, on artefacts and interference in EEG recording should have preceded Chapter 7 on supplementary recording procedures, but this is a very minor point and the figures and illustrations are clear and precise. Chapter 7.2 on intermittent photic stimulation (IPS) is the most controversial section in this otherwise reliable manual. I question the author's statement that the use of continuous IPS over a period with the flash rate slowly being increased and decreased cannot usually produce photic following (even taking into account the non-linearity of many photic stimulators). I do not share their belief that photic stimulation is a procedure "usually well-tolerated" by patients, and think that prolonging the procedure in order to produce the exact frequency at which patients are photosensitive is unnecessary and better-suited to the research laboratory than the average

hospital EEG department. However, I can thoroughly recommend this book as a comprehensive and very readable guide to EEG technology and it is not likely to be too expensive for the hospital departments or technicians.

PT ASSELMAN

Symposium on Idiopathic Low Back Pain (American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, Miami 1980). Edited by Augustus A White and Stephen L Gordon. (Pp 492; £43.25.) London: CV Mosby Company, 1982.

These proceedings of a multi-disciplinary workshop of scientists and clinicians consider the cause of backache. They finish, as they start, by recognising that the exact cause of an individual patient's pain is usually not known though the suggested clinical diagnosis of "idiopathic organic spinal pain" seems to me unlikely to replace the simpler "non-specific backache". This is not a text on how to treat a patient with backache but rather an over-view of current research into the physical basis of backache. As such, it is an essential library reference book which will be of interest mainly to those studying for examinations or those who find a search for knowledge compulsive. The sections on biomechanics and biochemistry are excellent as would be expected from the prestigious group of contributors. The section on epidemiology is good though marred by a poor statutory chapter on psychological factors. The section on anatomy is good though unexciting while the section in neuro-mechanisms is only fair though enlivened by a chapter on ectopic firing from damaged nerve. This is not light nor easy reading and requires careful study and thought, but no-one who views current medical treatment of backache should imagine that there is any easy answer. Its major value is in excellent summaries which integrate the individual contributions to define the questions which need answers, the direction which future research should take and the problems involved. It will be fascinating to re-read this review in 50 years to see which seeds germinate.

G WADDELL

Seminars in Neurological Surgery: Lumbar Disc Disease. Edited by RW Hardy. (Pp 344; \$47.12.) New York: Raven Press, 1982.

This is one of a new series of multi-author books on topics of neurosurgical interest

which are being sponsored by the Congress of Neurological Surgeons and the American Association of Neurological Surgeons. It sets a high standard and raises high expectations for some of the projected future titles in the series.

Most of the authors are from the Cleveland Clinic. The twenty chapters review these aspects of degenerative disease of the lumbar spine which are of most interest to the specialist in this field. No relevant topic appears to have been left out. Amongst chapters of especial value are those on CT scanning of the lumbar spine, the microsurgical treatment of lumbar disc disease, complications of lumbar disc surgery, repeat operations for lumbar disc, and non-surgical approaches to chronic back pain.

The book is well-edited and well-produced. Most of the chapters are succinct, clearly written and thoughtful and provide good lists of relevant and interesting references. The standard of production and of the illustrations is excellent. The fact that the problems of lumbar disc disease are discussed from the point of view of the neurosurgeon has resulted in a book which is unified and coherent and which avoids the nebulous muddle which, sadly, often results when attempts are made to bring together in a single volume the views on the lumbar spine of those in quite separate branches of medicine. It is strongly recommended to all specialists who have a serious interest in spinal disease. This reviewer is glad to possess his copy and anticipates that he will often need to consult it in the future, both for reference and for stimulation.

RS MAURICE-WILLIAMS