Imaging Modalities in Spinal Disorders
 Edited by Morrie E Kricun (Pp 689; £60.00.)
 Philadelphia: WB Saunders UK Distrib:
 Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988.

This is a major text book on spinal imaging by an assemblage of well-known American authors. It is a timely contribution to medical literature, because spinal imaging is an area in which progress has been particularly rapid in recent years. Methods of investigation, systems of interpretation, and management programmes based on these interpretations have changed greatly; many old concepts require burial, and many more new ones deserve greater exposure to those making decisions on the part of their patients. The editor has approached his task by combining the old with the new. He has chosen to consider each imaging modality as an entity, allowing full reign to a well known protagonist of each technique to discuss its value and limitations. Separate chapters are devoted to tests of doubtful value, such as epidural venography, thermography, sonography, diagnostic discography and facetography, alongside the more commonly applauded CT, computed myelography and especially MRI. There are also sections on interventional techniques such as, chemo-nucleolysis, spinal biopsy and of course, myelography and spinal angiography. The largest individual section concerns plain radiography, though this is to allow it to play an introductory role so that authors of the sections on special imaging could devote more space to their techniques rather than basic pathology.

The preface was written by Harold Jacobson. It is an encomium on the editor, who is not especially well known to us in the UK. The text is up to date, the latest references I could find were for October 1987.

To use as a reference book for individual conditions, the reader will find this text irritating. Information relevant to each condition is to be found scattered through several chapters, and despite the efforts of the editor, there is a lot of repetition of pathological details and they are not always congruous. The theme is orthopaedic more than neuroradiological, though this is not a criticism; but, in my opinion, the editor has been unduly conservative in his treatment of many concepts which are now obsolete and in allowing scant space to many new and exciting ones. Nevertheless, the book stands as the most modern and comprehensive work on spinal imaging currently available, and will be welcomed by all radiologists and clinicians concerned with disorders of the spine.

JOHN STEVENS

Psychiatric Aspects of Personal Injury Claims
 By George Mendelson (Pp 279;
 \$39.75.) Springfield: Charles C Thomas,
 1988.

In spite of the millions of pounds which compensation claims cost insurance companies and governments, there is a dearth of information and research from which informed opinion can be derived. In the court setting, myth and countermyth are likely to be perpetuated, particularly with some of the more subjective symptoms with which patients present, sometimes in settings where the extent of the trauma is not clear. This book ranges widely over the psychiatric aspects of personal injury claims, and leans heavily on DSM III and the revised DSM III R for classification of patients' syndromes.

The book is divided into three sections, the first giving some general considerations to the psychiatric evaluation of litigation, including a thorough clinical scheme for assessment. The issue of compensation neurosis is explored, defined by Foster Kennedy as "a state of mind, born out of fear, kept alive by avarice, stimulated by lawyers, and cured by a verdict". The validity of this statement is tested in Section 3 where the effects of compensation and litigation on treatment outcome are fully reviewed, which generally lead to supporting Professor Mendelson's own view that, to quote Kelly, "There is no longer any justification for a neurologist or a lawyer to stand up in court and affirm that it is well known that patients with such symptoms immediately return to work after their claim has been settled". The central section of the book catalogues the psychiatric disorders most often found amongst personal injury litigants which includes useful sections on the psychoses, an update on post-traumatic stress disorder, and discussion of the central issue namely malingering. Professor Mendelson rubbishes the term "functional overlay", being critical of medical "experts" who have an inability to make a clinical diagnosis. His clear statements that malingering "is not a diagnosable mental disorder" which, to quote Szasz "must be eliminated from psychiatric and medical writing as an item in the differential diagnosis of certain diseases" will be welcomed. Those who surrender to the temptation it offers would do well to note the case of Carl Kast, who killed two surgeons, and injured a third, after medical reports said of him "there is little wrong with him that a fat compensation settlement would not alleviate".

This well referenced book can be recommended to all those interested in post-

traumatic syndromes, in particular to neurologists and psychiatrists who frequently deal with the more subjective elements of symptomatology in the medicolegal setting.

MICHAEL R TRIMBLE

Aging and the Nervous System. By Salvatore Giaquinto. (Pp 223; £24.50.) Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1988.

This is a book with a difference. Its author is chief neurologist at the hospital of San Giovanni Battista in Rome, one of many Italian hospitals sponsored by the Order of the Knights of Malta. In 14 chapters, spanning 219 pages this single author volume covers in remarkable depth selected and salient aspects of the effects of aging on the human brain.

Eschewing the sophistries of current pseudo-scientific English usage he entitles chapters: "The figures"; "Biology and genetics of cellular aging"; "Illnesses of the older brain"; "The neurochemical riddle"; "CT scan, CBF, PET and NMR"; "Volts, hertz, milliseconds" and so on. Engagingly, he starts each chapter with a brief italicised provocative statement relating to the topic; some are succinct and stimulating: for example, under *The histological drama* "The aging brain loses weight, volume, neurons. It acquires histological features which also occur in Alzheimer's disease. What is the relationship between aging and dementia? Others are less pertinent.

It is a text selectively filled with interesting data and clear diagrams and invaluable, tabulated summaries. For example, in his chapter of conclusions are two tables: Table 14.1 Does Alzheimer's disease represent an exaggeration of normal aging? Yes. Some conclusions from the literature, and Table 14.2 ditto, No. Some conclusions . . . It is a book more about the varied manifestations of aging than about dementing diseases. There are adequate expositions on the capricious neurophysiological studies, and we learn that training programmes of stimulation can take advantage of neural plasticity to improve cognitive performance even in the elderly. The chapter on *Illnesses* provides orderly outlines of the major diseases, but detail is sparse and Creutzfeldt-Jakob syndrome, hydrocephalus and Binswanger's encephalopathy receive only one paragraph apiece. Metabolic encephalopathies, infective and post-traumatic states are neglected. A chapter on cognitive drugs spans less than four pages and does not do justice to the trials of physostigmine,