Book reviews

Clinical Aspects of Alzheimer's Disease and Senile Dementia (Aging, Vol 15) Edited by Nancy E Miller and Gene D Cohen (pp 371; \$53.04) New York: Raven Press, 1981.

This volume reports the second international conference on Alzheimer's disease and senile dementia held at the NIH in Bethesda. It starts with a seemingly endless series of introductory remarks and perspectives characterised more by verbosity than by new ideas. The next section is certainly the best. It describes the proposed criteria of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder, third edition (DSM-111) and its classification of dementing illnesses. Alzheimer's disease and senile dementia are merged, but are classified with six other organic syndromes which include schizophrenia, affective and organic delusional disorders. This is criticised with no little vehemence by Sir Martin Roth in an interesting discussion.

The importance of education, social, cultural, intelligence and personality is discussed by Gurland. He makes the point that these factors may mask early dementia or alternatively may mislead the psychiatrist into avoiding the specific diagnostic label by overcompensating for low social class. No illuminating account of the clinical picture or of the neuropathology of Alzheimer's disease is to be found here, nor are recent neurochemical findings discussed. A sketchy survey of questionnaires and of neurological tests is included, but no clear advice on selection of either patients or investigation is proffered. Miller contributes two sound chapters on cognitive defects and differential psychological evaluation which illustrate the considerable difficulties which the psychologist has in definition and in testing various facets of disintegrating mental function. Here too there is over-simplification; dementia being "taken to be those conditions that are characterised by cerebral atrophy eg Alzheimer's disease or senile dementia." The problems of *in vivo* definition of atrophy itself are not discussed, nor are

the objective measurements attainable by CT scanning considered.

The third section deals with treatment by drugs, psychotherapy, behavioural and environmental manipulations. Hence we are in difficulties: firstly the jargon is often incomprehensible (but I will not labour the point by quotations); secondly the assessment of psycho-social treatment is notoriously imprecise. Inadequately investigated patients makes it difficult to interpret any alleged improvement which may result from treatment in any particular disease entity. This makes much of this prolix account as unenlightening as it is boring.

The last section on community treatment is little more edifying. It does, however, show a shift of emphasis from our traditionally organic approach. Cellular pathology and the search for biochemical aberrations in these diseases appear to have passed into a phase of stagnation. If true, this is regrettable, but the importance of assessing community versus institutional care is considerable. So far the harmful effects of custodial care of the individual in hospital, or even putting his name on a waiting list have been shown, and little benefit accrues other than the preservation of his physical welfare. However, a compassionate view of the effects of the dement on his family at home is an apt observation which should temper the difficult management of such patients.

This volume shares a serious fault with many similar current publications, namely the failure of the publishers and editor to indicate which of the many contributors are medically qualified and which are not. The incursion of science graduates in medical research is a welcome advance of recent years, but the weight attached to their gratuitous comments on matters medical has to be assessed by the reader against their non-medical training, and this can be easily shown in the list of contributors.

This book is dominated by a social and psychological approach. The soft science which pervades most of the contributions is unsatisfactory and has led to much woolly thinking and even

woollier language. A stricter editorial red pencil would have improved the book which fails to match up to the growing number of existing monographs on the subject.

JMS PEARCE

Research Progress in Parkinson's Disease Edited by FC Rose and R Capildeo (pp 413; £25) Tunbridge Wells: Pitman Medical Ltd, 1981.

Published with commendable speed this book consists of the papers presented at a symposium attended by a formidable team of international experts from many disciplines. The accepted defects of publications of this kind have been minimised by rigorous editorial activity and it provides a valuable record for those who attended the meeting and a useful reference source for those engaged in current research. It is a pity that it was not possible to include the lively discussion generated by the papers because to my mind it is this section which allows the audience to obtain a grasp of the essential issues in a rapidly advancing field. The sections embracing neurochemistry and neuropharmacology are particularly stimulating for the general reader and this is well exemplified by the section on encephalins and motor disorders where complex recent papers are pithily summarised.

Most reviewers will agree that whereas the scanning of the contents of recent scientific papers and published symposia is invariably educative they will probably confess that conventional literary styles rarely give rise to genuine pleasure. This volume contains a notable exception. Dr Macdonald Critchley's elegant defence of the identity of arteriosclerotic Parkinsonism is a joy to read and should be obligatory reading instructions for those invited to speak at future meetings. While few can realistically aspire to his characteristic clarity, wit and scholarship and fewer will be able to refer to their own papers published fifty years earlier, we might all be inspired to write more clearly and attractively.

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