Book reviews

Neurology: The Physician's Guide. Edited by Robert G Feldman. (Pp 276; DM98.00.) Stuttgart: Georg Thieme Verlag, 1984.

In this well produced paperback Prof Feldman has produced a series of neurological essays for general medical practitioners. Each of the 16 chapters is written by a neurologist, many from the esteemed Boston University School of Medicine. The topics have been chosen on the basis of the frequency of presentation in the general practice of medicine.

With this aim in view, the selection is a good one. Epilepsy, sleep disorders and states of altered consciousness, follow an oversimplified introductory chapter on the clinical assessment and a brief statement on neuroradiological procedures. Dizziness, headache, cerebrovascular disease, Parkinsonism, alcoholism and multiple sclerosis are covered in turn. The editor's special choices are chapters on environmental and occupational neurology, neurological complications of pregnancy and common neurological problems in childhood.

It is not easy to know whether the subject matter will educate and inform those for whom it is intended. Many of the contributions are simply short eclectic accounts, differing but little from textbook information. The standard varies inevitably, both in content and style. A number of loose, woolly statements diminish the reader's interest. Does it help anyone to say about monotherapy for epilepsy "... complete seizure control in 31 to 80% of patients. . ." or "therapy should be maintained for 2 to 5 years after the diagnosis." Well, which?! The chapter on headache opens with the stunning observation "Pain is a private experience. As such it is intrinsically unknowable to an observer." In an otherwise excellent short chapter on cerebrovascular disease Phillip Wolf gives the generalist little guidance on treatment with aspirin and anticoagulants, nor is the controversial thromboendarterectomy discussed. Rosman gives a fine account (reprinted from another article) on inattention and overactivity, then gives rather brief descriptions of seizures and head injury in childhood; but there is no mention of the many other common disorders falling under the chapter heading "Common Neurologic Problems in Childhood". I enjoyed both these chapters, and was impressed by the ones on sleep disorder

(George F Howard) and multiple sclerosis (Charles Posers).

With its neoteric preoccupation with investigation, I think this volume may succeed in the USA, but though I know of no British book addressing this audience I doubt whether British GPs or general physicians would find that it caters for their neurological needs. The idea is a good one however, and I hope that it achieves a second edition which might confront more specific practical problems and give more didactic advice rather than depend on discursive essays. Attention might be paid to the more common peripheral nerve palsies and spinal cord diseases which are barely mentioned.

JMS PEARCE

Neurosurgery. 3 Volumes. Edited by Robert H Wilkins and Setti S Rengachary. (Pp 2816; £450.) Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Book Co (UK) Ltd, 1985.

How should one reviewer attempt to do justice to a work of this size (Weight 5.5 kg; Pages nearly 3000) produced by over 400 authors and covering the whole field of neurosurgery? Can it be done? If the work were inferior, it would be easy to dismiss it. That this one is excellent is more difficult to explain in a short review. Firstly, the more superficial qualities are impressive. In spite of its total weight, each of the three volumes is (as is sometimes said of a motor car or a horse) "easy to handle". The binding will survive much usage, the paper and printing are a joy and the quality of the half-tone and line drawings throughout is admirable. I used the book as long as I dared before supplying this review. The categories of enquiry I chose were firstly matters about which I knew nothing and, secondly, those few where I thought I knew a lot. In the first group I was never disappointed and felt confident that I had learnt the essential aspects. In the second, I found little or nothing to fault. The references seem to have been properly pruned and selected and are therefore not very numerous. The 80-page index is skillfully arranged as it should be in such an encyclopaedic work. One lengthy appendix provides the essential details of drugs commonly used in neurological surgery, while another provides the range of values for commonly performed laboratory tests. Most impressive is the way in which the two editors have secured a uniformly high standard of style and pre-

sentation from their enormous team of authors.

There remains the inevitable question for whom is the work intended? I have little doubt that it will be on the shelves of every Board candidate in North America as I believe there is nothing to compare with it for reliable up-to-date information over a wide field. In my opinion it should be in every neurosurgical departmental library worldwide in spite of the capital outlay which nevertheless will be well worthwhile.

KENNETH TILLEY

The Right Hemisphere: Neurology and Neuropsychology. (Monographs in Neuroscience, Volume 1.) Edited by Alfred Ardila and Peggy Ostrosky-Solis. (Pp 277; \$58.00.) New York: Gordon & Breach Inc, 1984.

The Right Hemisphere is a further addition to the expanding list of books which deal with the nature of cerebral specialisation. It is also the first volume of a Neuroscience Series edited by S Weinstein which aims at bringing together work dealing with new specialisations and new technologies.

The book contains 12 contributions under three main headings:— basic problems, clinical considerations and experimental evidence. Some of the papers present new research on specific topics. For instance, there is a paper on the effects of right hemisphere lesions in rats and others on event-related potentials and hemispheric specialisation. Other papers summarise evidence for a particular theoretical position. For example the brief chapter by Le Douarin deals with the role played by the inferior parietal region in primitive communication systems. The majority of the papers give summaries or reviews on various topics without attempting to take a special theoretical stand.

The main shortcoming of the volume is lack of balance on the choice of topics. For instance, five out of the 12 chapters deal with some aspects of language function. They cover subjects such as the right hemisphere participation of language, the disturbances of emotional language with right hemisphere lesions and cross aphasia in dextrals. There is also a psycho-linguistic review dealing with right hemisphere function and language development. By contrast, other important functions of the right hemisphere, for example, visuo-spatial abilities, face perception and perception and recognition of musical passages, are