Headache. (Series in Clinical Epidemiology.) By William Estlin Waters. (Pp 156; £17.95.) Beckenham: Croom Helm Ltd, 1986.

Epidemiological data about headache are sparse. Almost all of the many published series suffer from serious defects both of definition and of precise clinical categorisation of each patient. A book devoted to this topic is thus welcome, and brings with it the hope that careful analysis will shed new light on the many unanswered questions or, at least, provoke new approaches.

This compact book will answer a number of pertinent questions about headache. If, for instance, you want to know its prevalence, its age and sex distribution, the economic cost of absence from work, or data on family or twin prevalence, then the available epidemiological data are collected here with appropriate references.

Essentially, this book republishes much of Waters' earlier work in the Rhondda Fach and expands its background. It argues that migraine is "part of the continuum of headache, similar to the concept of hypertension in relation to the continuum of blood pressure." It tells us "there is remarkably little evidence that migraine is qualitatively different from other headaches." The clinician's enthusiasm for the taxonomic identity of migraine is thus challenged, but unfortunately is not replaced by anything else of substance.

Much of the book attempts to deal with the important problems of definition, and it tries (many would say in vain) to justify the epidemiologist's use of questionnaires as a valid tool of investigation. Until some objective observation or test is agreed as a diagnostic yardstick, the collection of soft data can yield only the most rough and ready information; and when such a test materialises all the arguments adduced for questionnaires will fall by the wayside. Other sections deal sketchily with historical aspects, treatment, underlying causes and diet: these fail to do justice to these aspects of headache and would have been better left to existing clinically orientated texts.

In a nicely produced format, the author has made a commendable effort to cast a critical eye on contemporary problems of definition and provokes us to question the validity of the terms "syndrome" and "cause". Unfortunately, he provides few answers. It is likely that the data obtained by epidemiologists will be as shaky and possibly less secure than those obtained by good clinicians who have at least individually questioned and examined each patient.

JMS PEARCE

Brain CT: An Introduction By John R Bradshaw (Pp 199; £9.95.) Bristol: Wright, 1985

This short book begins with a very brief description of the basic principles of CT scanning of the brain, a series of clearly labelled scans illustrating simple normal anatomy and a few common artefacts and normal variants.

The main text comprises a series of case studies in which common pathological conditions are divided according to their various CT appearances, for example low density non enhancing, low density enhancing, high density non enhancing etc. For each there is a brief history, a number of good quality scans presenting the features, a short discussion on the differential diagnosis and why the final diagnosis is most likely. The case studies of which there are 86 are set out to enable the reader to attempt a diagnosis on the history and CT appearances before moving to the text.

I personally find the format where cases are divided into their density and enhancing characteristics over simplistic and often misleading; inter alia it leads to cross referencing which is confusing where some of the more common pathologies are discussed under more than one heading. Some of the cases shown whilst they are reasonable are not entirely typical of the conditions which they represent and in a book of such limited scope I feel this is an additional error.

Despite these criticisms I feel this book has some merit. The illustrations alone will help some of the readers the book is aimed at, namely junior medical staff, nurses, radiographers and medical students.

TCS COX

Microneurosurgical Atlas. By Kenichiro Sugita (Pp 275; \$245.00.) New York: Springer-Verlag, 1985.

All surgeons love to talk about their difficult cases; like the conversations of fishermen and golfers, such tales should not always be taken at face value! Prof Sugita's book makes it clear that he does have exceptional talents as a neurosurgeon, but he also has an exceptional ability to resist the temptation to gloss over failure or to exaggerate success. His book is a tribute to his analytical, self critical approach, which underlies his important contributions to the evolution and refinement of microneurosurgical techniques.

The book consists of six sections but the first two, General Considerations and Instruments, are dealt with in only nine pages. The four major sections concern the surgery of aneurysms, of arteriovenous malformations, of meningiomas, and of neuromas and other brain tumours. Although each starts with a consideration of basic principles, the author's message is conveyed mainly through detailed descriptions of more than 100 different operations. Each is illustrated by an attractive, clear, and informative drawing. The reader is helped to gain the maximum information from each case from reproduction of the pre and post operative radiographs, and from concise accounts which emphasise the critical parts of the operation. The author's comments upon what lessons he learnt from that particular case are particularly valuable; these include both demonstrations of what is possible, and also what he learnt not to do again, even the admission that some operations might better have not been carried out. The occasional references to the occurrence of "massive haemorrhage" and of the surgeon being afraid, not only paint a vivid picture, but also leave no doubt that the account is scrupulously true.

The conviction of the message is an important consideration, because this is not a book for the beginner, for whom there are more didactic, dogmatic texts available. Instead this is more of a diary, in which the author shares his experience with other neurosurgeons. Most of Professor Sugita's messages are now widely accepted: the value of the author's specially designed aneurysm clips, the use of multiple clips in difficult circumstances; the various methods for prevention or control of bleeding in vascular lesions and tumours; the benefits of retraction of tumours with the author's specially designed hooks; and also the need to accept that parts of benign basal tumours might best be left rather than risk damage during complete removal.

One criticism is that rather too much emphasis is placed upon unusual cases; thus, the section on aneurysms of the vertebrobasilar system is twice as long as that on aneurysms of the anterior circulation, which are several times more common. The section on acoustic neuromas is somewhat superficial; it is the only one in which the author does not present individual cases but simply refers to general principles. These sometimes lack precise directions, for example about exactly how to use anatomy to locate the origin of the facial nerve, or the anterior inferior cerebellar artery, and about how to avoid damage to these structures.