Book reviews

Essentials of Neurosurgery by Richard Hayward (pp 275; £9.75) Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications: 1980.

Neurosurgery has long since come of age, and gained acceptance as one of the major and respected surgical specialties. The work of the present-day neurosurgeon brings him into contact with nearly all his specialist colleagues—to share in their clinical decisions, and to provide practical surgical help. From time to time it is appropriate that current practice in the specialty should be summarised for presentation to the more general reader and practitioner. In this way the physicians and surgeons of tomorrow will be kept informed of what the neurosurgeon can and what he cannot achieve.

The purpose of this volume is to define the scope of neurosurgery and to explain how patients are selected, investigated and treated. It is also the author's aim to provide a sound foundation on which the interested reader may further his studies. The work is intended primarily for junior hospital staff, and also for postgraduates in medicine and surgery preparing for higher examinations. The first three chapters are concerned with cerebral blood flow, raised intracranial pressure, and the neuro-radiological investigations now available. The various intracranial conditions of every-day practice—injury, haemorrhage, tumour, infection and the corresponding spinal problems are covered in detail. There are also contributions on the principles of stereotactic surgery and what is now popularly known as functional neurosurgery—the relief of pain and the surgery of epilepsy and involuntary movements.

Those who write for the young and uninitiated have a special responsibility to give clear guidance on the essentials of their subject, to supply some relevant facts and figures as a starting point for knowledge and understanding, and to present the whole in concise and simple language. Judged by these criteria, this is a very disappointing production. The author has chosen to present the essentials wherever possible in list form, avoiding continuous narrative. This method will surely be attractive to the reader whose only desire is to pass an examination, and it must be an easy way to assemble material, but the effect is uninspiring. The specialist author should be able to add something extra, to enliven and bring emphasis to what otherwise becomes a rather dull catalogue. The chapter on head injury is probably the

most valuable to the general reader. Here there is a profusion of fact, but little practical advice. The Casualty Officer will find no guidance on who is to be admitted to hospital and who may be safely allowed home. He will learn six reasons for elevating a depressed skull fracture, but will not learn how easily such injuries can be overlooked. For guidance on the assessment of consciousness—the basis of all head injury management—he will be referred to a diagram. He will look in vain for help on how to distinguish the patient in urgent need of surgery from the one who can safely travel. He will find no clear account of those signs which herald disaster. The classification of head injury into four grades—very severe, severe, moderate and mild—must be peculiar to the author.

Throughout the work failure to highlight essentials is equalled only by the paucity of information on the results of treatment. Descriptions of operative procedures surely require some assessment of their value. For example, there is no mention at all of the outcome of treatment for aneurysm or arteriovenous malformation. For those with cervical myelopathy we are told only that the operations carry a definite prospect of improvement. Not much of a foundation for further study.

This volume has all the signs of having been hurriedly assembled. Many of the sentences are unnecessarily complicated, many are superfluous, and not a few are grammatically incorrect. Spelling errors are commonplace and there are some interesting neologisms. How much responsibility for this state of affairs rests with the publishers is not clear, but it suggests a very poor standard of editing, and something approaching indifference to the sensibilities of prospective readers.

JJ MACCABE

Anxiety and Emotions, Physiological Basis and Treatment By D Kelly (pp 402; \$24.75) Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1980.

This is a specialised book which deals with some physiological aspects of anxiety, notably cardiovascular, endocrine and biochemical changes. Most of the huge and important literature since

1975 is not referred to, and the section on treatment is basic. A useful detailed account is given of some early work carried out by Gantt, and of the author's own studies in anxious patients concerning blood flow through the forearm muscles, the effects of intravenous infusions of sodium lactate, and changes after psychosurgery.

ISAAC MARKS

Antiepileptic Therapy: Advances in Drug Monitoring Edited by SI Johannessen, PL Morselli, CE Pippenger, A Richens, D Schmidt, and H Meinardi (pp 425; \$47.60) New York: Raven Press, 1979.

In the last decade there has been a considerable growth of interest in serum level monitoring of antiepileptic drugs which is now widely accepted as a valuable aid in the drug treatment of epilepsy. The growth of this field is illustrated by the series of workshops on the Determination of Antiepileptic Drugs in Biological Fluids (WODADIBOF), of which the present text, based on a meeting in Oslo in the summer of 1979, is the fourth. Topics covered in this latest volume include the special problems of drug treatment in childhood epilepsy (including febrile convulsions); the most recent clinical pharmacological and pharmacokinetic data (in which carbamazepine and sodium valproate figure prominently); drug interactions; clinical studies of the application of monitoring, including the place of monotherapy of polytherapy; and the latest technical developments. For reasons which are not clear the final two papers are on endocrine and immunological aspects of drug treatment.

This book will be of most interest to those clinicians, pharmacologists and biochemists actively engaged in the developments of this field. It will be of less value to neurologists or paediatricians with little knowledge of clinical pharmacology who are looking for simple practical guidance in the use of drug levels in the care of epileptic patients. For anyone wishing to review the evidence from which such guidelines are evolving this book can be recommended.

EH REYNOLDS