Cerebral Vasospasm edited by DJ Boullin (pp 337; £15.00) Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1980.

This book deals with the clinical, pharmacological and pathological aspects of cerebral arterial spasm. The main emphasis of course is on cerebral vasospasm after subarachnoid haemorrhage due to a ruptured aneurysm, but the book also contains information relevant to head trauma, migraine and meningitis. Section 1 gives the historical perspectives of vasospasm and emphasises its association with a poor prognosis. There follows a chapter by J Mohan outlining the neurosurgeon’s view of the relationship of vasospasm to surgical outcome. The chapter by George du Boulay on “Angiography—the radiologist’s view” is without doubt one of the best in the book. His other chapter on “Cerebral blood flow in man and animals” also exhibits a clear and lucid style. This chapter deals with CBF methodology and CBF measurement in subarachnoid haemorrhage. I found it slightly curious that Dr Boullin in his chapter on “Principles of control of cerebral arterial blood flow” felt it necessary to deal with methodology as well. Furthermore surely auto-regulation means the intrinsic ability of an organ to regulate its own blood supply in the absence of the autonomic nervous system? I can understand that if one firmly believes that prostacyclin is the important regulator of the cerebral circulation it is inconvenient to quote the literature extensively on the controversial matter of neurological control. However half a page or so hardly does justice to the complexity of this topic. If space were at a premium then all reference to Poiseuille’s law could well have been omitted. This law only applies to tubes of constant diameter and is in any event not applicable where flow is pulsatile. On the other hand Dr Boullin’s chapters on the pharmacological basis of spasm and clinical aspects are really quite good. A description of pathological changes in arteries after aneurysm rupture and other head injuries completes the first section. The second section which is entirely by Dr Boullin concentrates on recent advances in prostaglandin research, the discovery of the dilator prostaglandin prostacyclin and its potential role in the physiological control mechanism of cerebral blood flow and in the clinical treatment of vasospasm. New methods of drug administration to neurosurgical patients are described. The book concludes with an evaluation of model systems useful in the stimulation of cerebral vasospasm and its relief.

This book should be read by anyone with an interest in this important topic. At £15 a copy many will be tempted to obtain the book for their own personal library.

IM JAMES

Alcoholism: The Facts By Donald W Goodwin (pp 129; £4.95) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981. Donald Goodwin is Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Kansas. His research on the genetics of alcoholism has won international acclaim. Before turning to medicine he was a professional journalist. The book is of interest therefore both in relation to content, and the art form of popular presentation. As regards content, Goodwin lays out much information which should be useful to the intended readership—“people who worry about drinking—their own or somebody else’s.” The implicit framework of understanding which is offered is, though, essentially the traditional one of “alcohol as a disease,” with less emphasis on that great array of alcohol-related troubles which make up the greater part of the community’s adverse experience with this drug. The author is against population control of alcohol-consumption, by tax or licensing, as a prevention measure. Inevitably “the facts” are as it transpires not facts, but one distinguished author’s interpretation of reality, considerably influenced by the orthodoxies of the old-time American alcoholism establishment.

As regards style, the exposition is free-flowing and refreshingly devoid of jargon. Any medical writer interested in the art of popularisation could turn to this book for a tutorial.

GRIFFITH EDWARDS

Head Injury By Louis Bakay and Franz E Glasauer (pp 445; $32.25) Boston: Little Brown & Co, 1980. The management of head injured patients has altered dramatically in the last decade and is still changing. Many