The 1984 Year Book of Psychiatry and Applied Mental Health. Editors: Freedman, Lourie, Meltzer, Nemiah, Talbott and Weiner. (Pp 440; £34.50.) Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Pubs, 1984.

This is one of an extensive series covering most aspects of medicine, the aim of which is "to provide, in condensed form, the essence of the best of recent international medical literature". The material presented in this volume is selected by distinguished editors who review critically the contents of 96 journals published in America, in other English-speaking countries, and in Western Europe. All aspects of psychiatry are covered, with some reference to work in other branches of medicine including neurology and some topics in psychology, social work and environmental health are also included.

The material covered in the 1984 Year Book represents literature reviewed up to and including June 1983. Its appearance in book form in March 1984 is a considerable achievement. Each chapter consists of that editor's choice of important papers that have appeared since the previous volume was published. Each paper is summarised briefly and there are two styles of comment on the material covered. One provides an overview of the advances in the subject area over the period; the other comments on individual papers. It seems likely that a combination of the two would be the most useful for each chapter. The summaries themselves are of variable quality and the choice of papers reflects to some extent the need for speed in assessment.

It is difficult to be sure for whom these books are intended. The chapters containing an overview may be useful as indications of relatively up-to-date thinking on a particular topic, for readers with a special interest. The collections of key papers may be of use as a basis for the start of a literature search by a research worker moving into a new area. The chapters could have a more generally educative function for the general reader, and this last might perhaps be their greatest use, though the book is hard to read and would be best dipped into.

The place of such volumes seems to be becoming increasingly uncertain now that excellent review journals are widely available. The summaries themselves are better written in *Excerpta Medica Psychiatry*. Those in the Year Book though longer, still require the reader to return to the original to evaluate the work quoted. The review journals are very up-to-date and it is easier to scan these month by month than to read

a Year Book in any depth. Clearly however the advantages of the book over these journals lies in editorial selection and comment, though much of this has an American perspective as would be expected. It may be that the advantages of editorial selection are outweighed by the exclusion of papers thought of little interest by him, which could be of considerable value to another reader.

In summary this book is full of interesting summaries and comments but by its very nature is a little out of date by the time it appears. It may well be a useful source book for libraries, but it seems unlikely to be bought by individuals both because of its drawbacks and because of its price.

ISOBEL K CARD

Psychopharmacology of the Limbic System. British Association for Psychopharmacology Monograph No 5. Edited by Michael R Trimble and E Zarifian. (Pp 266; £17.50.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.

The British Association for Psychopharmacology have published a series of monographs over the last few years dealing with aspects of psychopharmacology. This, the fifth in the series, is the proceedings of a meeting held jointly in Paris between the British and French Associations. The book comprises 17 chapters dealing with anatomy, neurophysiology, behaviour and pharmacology of the limbic system.

But can various systems like the limbic system be separated out of the complex circuitry which comprises our central nervous system? Some of the contributors in this volume try manfully to allocate a special role for the limbic system in various nervous functions especially emotion. Despite all this effort this reviewer remains to be convinced that the limbic system comprises a functional entity which can be viewed in isolation.

As with previous monographs in this series, the papers are uniformly authoritative, comprehensive and well edited. The different topics are dealt with in a very critical and informative way and the book can be thoroughly recommended as a cohesive and comprehensive account of the topic.

MH LADER