Book reviews

Neurosurgical Critical Care. Concepts in Neurosurgery Vol 1. Edited by Fremont P Wirth, Robert A Ratcheson. (Pp 253; £41.00.) London: Williams & Wilkins, 1987.

This is a monograph on neurosurgical intensive care. It comes with the authority of the American Congress of Neurological Surgeons and is intended as an update for the neurosurgical trainee. There are 253 pages and 11 chapters; it is a multiple author text and most authors are neurosurgeons.

Chapters are reviews of critical care; they are classified by system: respiratory, neuro-endocrine etc and they are variable. Some, for example the chapters by Rowlands *et al* and Ward *et al*, are excellent, others are poor although all have something to offer. These are review articles of principles of critical care in neurological disorders. This is not a handbook for practical care in ITU; basic data such as endotracheal tube sizes at different ages, neonatal/paediatric fluid balance, drug dosages in the young, are not given.

My main criticism is its lack of critique. Intensive care has risks as well as benefits. We need to know who requires admission to neurosurgical ITU? what level of intensive care is required for a given disorder? what are the risk-benefits and cost-benefits of treatment? These are not discussed. Similarly many chapters imply that there is a single treatment for a given disorder; this is not correct. Critical care requires continued patient re-evaluation and selection of appropriate management under the changing conditions occurring in these critically ill patients. There was a general failure to relate the subjects specifically to neurosurgical problems.

Neurosurgical trainees, particularly those who have little experience of ITU, should read this book; they need not necessarily own a copy. It has less to offer doctors experienced in ITU who wish to learn more

about the specific problems encountered in neurosurgical practice.

NV TODD

Electrical Stimulation and Neuromuscular Disorder. Edited by WA Nix, G Vrbova. (Pp 160; DM 98.00.) Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1986.

Electrical stimulation techniques to promote the recovery of wasted or denervated muscles are widely used—the ultimate current application of this being in connection with the attempts to restore gait to paraplegics. Despite the widespread clinical use of such techniques clear data validating their rationale and efficacy appear elusive. It is highly appropriate therefore that the *Proceedings of the First International Symposium on Electrical Stimulation and Neuromuscular Disease* should be published even though the meeting was in March 1985. This slim volume provides a brief survey of work relating to the effect of electrical stimulation on intact and denervated muscle in animal models.

The initial section *Effects of Nerves on Muscle* is a series of five review papers discussing the role of activity in motor unit development, the response to chronic stimulation, the effect of the latter on metabolism and capillary supply, the control of the distribution of the acetylcholine receptor and the factors influencing motor nerve growth. These chapters give very lucid accounts without an excess of experimental detail. The next section on *Repair Processes in the Peripheral Nervous System* deals with more laboratory material than could be usefully digested by a reader looking for an overview. The final section *Muscle Plasticity in Disease* is a mixed bag of material enclosing a fine account of the effects of stretch in retarding atrophy, the effects of stimulating denervated muscle (in animal models) and brief accounts of electrical stimulation in Duchenne dystrophy and idiopathic scoliosis.

This book perhaps lacks a critical review

of what has been achieved previously using electrical stimulation in the clinical arena. This would have at least highlighted our lack of knowledge. The review section at the beginning is the best part of this book but other parts are well referenced though excessively specialised for the general reader. The book could be recommended as introductory reading for research workers but I rather doubt whether clinicians and physiotherapists will delve too deeply.

CM WILES

Brain Peptides Update. Volume 1. Edited by Joseph B Martin, Michael J Brownstein and Dorothy T Krieger. (Pp 261; £50.45.) Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd. 1987.

This is the first of a series designed to update the large *Brain Peptides* volume produced in 1983. The editors have attempted to do this by inviting some of their original contributors to write short up-date chapters and in other cases by requesting longer reviews of newer topics from additional contributors. In this respect the chapters by Illana Gozes, Ruth Siegel and by Jackson and Lechan reflect the increasing importance of cloning techniques in neuroscience. These chapters and the longer contributions by Marshak and Fraser, Rorstad, Walsh and Dockray are well written and worth having; however, I found the various short "up-date" contributions of limited value and this rather detracts from the value of the book other than as an extension of the original volume.

It would, I feel, be more worthwhile for the editors, if the series continues, to encourage their contributors to write in more depth or more critically if doing an up-date. Taking the volume as a whole it is valuable as an extension of the original; however, I could not really recommend its separate purchase as many of the chapters are of little use to the reader without the original volume.

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