

Imaging Modalities in Spinal Disorders
 Edited by Morrie E Kricun (Pp 689; £60.00.)
 Philadelphia: WB Saunders UK Distrib:
 Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988.

This is a major text book on spinal imaging by an assemblage of well-known American authors. It is a timely contribution to medical literature, because spinal imaging is an area in which progress has been particularly rapid in recent years. Methods of investigation, systems of interpretation, and management programmes based on these interpretations have changed greatly; many old concepts require burial, and many more new ones deserve greater exposure to those making decisions on the part of their patients. The editor has approached his task by combining the old with the new. He has chosen to consider each imaging modality as an entity, allowing full reign to a well known protagonist of each technique to discuss its value and limitations. Separate chapters are devoted to tests of doubtful value, such as epidural venography, thermography, sonography, diagnostic discography and facetography, alongside the more commonly applauded CT, computed myelography and especially MRI. There are also sections on interventional techniques such as, chemonucleolysis, spinal biopsy and of course, myelography and spinal angiography. The largest individual section concerns plain radiography, though this is to allow it to play an introductory role so that authors of the sections on special imaging could devote more space to their techniques rather than basic pathology.

The preface was written by Harold Jacobson. It is an encomium on the editor, who is not especially well known to us in the UK. The text is up to date, the latest references I could find were for October 1987.

To use as a reference book for individual conditions, the reader will find this text irritating. Information relevant to each condition is to be found scattered through several chapters, and despite the efforts of the editor, there is a lot of repetition of pathological details and they are not always congruous. The theme is orthopaedic more than neuroradiological, though this is not a criticism; but, in my opinion, the editor has been unduly conservative in his treatment of many concepts which are now obsolete and in allowing scant space to many new and exciting ones. Nevertheless, the book stands as the most modern and comprehensive work on spinal imaging currently available, and will be welcomed by all radiologists and clinicians concerned with disorders of the spine.

JOHN STEVENS

Psychiatric Aspects of Personal Injury Claims
 By George Mendelson (Pp 279;
 \$39.75.) Springfield: Charles C Thomas,
 1988.

In spite of the millions of pounds which compensation claims cost insurance companies and governments, there is a dearth of information and research from which informed opinion can be derived. In the court setting, myth and countermyth are likely to be perpetuated, particularly with some of the more subjective symptoms with which patients present, sometimes in settings where the extent of the trauma is not clear. This book ranges widely over the psychiatric aspects of personal injury claims, and leans heavily on DSM III and the revised DSM III R for classification of patients' syndromes.

The book is divided into three sections, the first giving some general considerations to the psychiatric evaluation of litigation, including a thorough clinical scheme for assessment. The issue of compensation neurosis is explored, defined by Foster Kennedy as "a state of mind, born out of fear, kept alive by avarice, stimulated by lawyers, and cured by a verdict". The validity of this statement is tested in Section 3 where the effects of compensation and litigation on treatment outcome are fully reviewed, which generally lead to supporting Professor Mendelson's own view that, to quote Kelly, "There is no longer any justification for a neurologist or a lawyer to stand up in court and affirm that it is well known that patients with such symptoms immediately return to work after their claim has been settled". The central section of the book catalogues the psychiatric disorders most often found amongst personal injury litigants which includes useful sections on the psychoses, an update on post-traumatic stress disorder, and discussion of the central issue namely malingering. Professor Mendelson rubbishes the term "functional overlay", being critical of medical "experts" who have an inability to make a clinical diagnosis. His clear statements that malingering "is not a diagnosable mental disorder" which, to quote Szasz "must be eliminated from psychiatric and medical writing as an item in the differential diagnosis of certain diseases" will be welcomed. Those who surrender to the temptation it offers would do well to note the case of Carl Kast, who killed two surgeons, and injured a third, after medical reports said of him "there is little wrong with him that a fat compensation settlement would not alleviate".

This well referenced book can be recommended to all those interested in post-

traumatic syndromes, in particular to neurologists and psychiatrists who frequently deal with the more subjective elements of symptomatology in the medicolegal setting.

MICHAEL R TRIMBLE

Aging and the Nervous System. By Salvatore Giaquinto. (Pp 223; £24.50.) Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1988.

This is a book with a difference. Its author is chief neurologist at the hospital of San Giovanni Battista in Rome, one of many Italian hospitals sponsored by the Order of the Knights of Malta. In 14 chapters, spanning 219 pages this single author volume covers in remarkable depth selected and salient aspects of the effects of aging on the human brain.

Eschewing the sophistries of current pseudo-scientific English usage he entitles chapters: "The figures"; "Biology and genetics of cellular aging"; "Illnesses of the older brain"; "The neurochemical riddle"; "CT scan, CBF, PET and NMR"; "Volts, hertz, milliseconds" and so on. Engagingly, he starts each chapter with a brief italicised provocative statement relating to the topic; some are succinct and stimulating; for example, under *The histological drama* "The aging brain loses weight, volume, neurons. It acquires histological features which also occur in Alzheimer's disease. What is the relationship between aging and dementia? Others are less pertinent.

It is a text selectively filled with interesting data and clear diagrams and invaluable, tabulated summaries. For example, in his chapter of conclusions are two tables: Table 14.1 Does Alzheimer's disease represent an exaggeration of normal aging? Yes. Some conclusions from the literature, and Table 14.2 ditto, No. Some conclusions . . . It is a book more about the varied manifestations of aging than about dementing diseases. There are adequate expositions on the capricious neurophysiological studies, and we learn that training programmes of stimulation can take advantage of neural plasticity to improve cognitive performance even in the elderly. The chapter on *Illnesses* provides orderly outlines of the major diseases, but detail is sparse and Creutzfeldt-Jakob syndrome, hydrocephalus and Binswanger's encephalopathy receive only one paragraph apiece. Metabolic encephalopathies, infective and post-traumatic states are neglected. A chapter on cognitive drugs spans less than four pages and does not do justice to the trials of physostigmine,

arecholine or THA, although their value is of a small order. Certain statements will evoke protest or frank disbelief: "The removal of meningiomas is fatal in half of all cases . . ."

Professor Giaquinto has written an excellent and original monograph. It testifies to the singular virtues of the one man work in its clear writing, literary illusions and unquestionable scholarship. I hope he eventually produces a second edition, in which a few extra pages might provide us with a more balanced coverage. I hope the idiosyncrasies of a single author work are not thereby obscured. Strongly recommended.

JMS PEARCE

Textbook of Epilepsy. 3rd ed. Edited by John Laidlaw, Alan Richens, Jolyon Oxley. (Pp 644; £60.00.) Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, 1988.

This will be a valuable reference work for neurologists, psychiatrists and paediatricians. Epilepsy is covered widely, from the pharmacokinetics of anticonvulsant drugs on one hand to the educational, employment and legal problems faced by patients on the other. The well organised and accessible section on the pharmacology of anticonvulsant drugs by Rimmer and Richens will prove invaluable to those of us who have difficulty memorising copious pharmacological details. Marsden and Reynold's clear prose transmits an authoritative account of "seizures in adults" which will repay reading by medical students and consultant neurologists alike. Wallace, a new contributor to the book, provides an admirably comprehensive, although lengthy account of the varied seizure types encountered in paediatric practice. Polkey has written a valuable account of the considerations underlying the surgical treatment of epilepsy interspersed with some illuminating asides based on his own extensive clinical experience of such patients.

The third edition has recruited Dr J Oxley to the editorship. It is a more even book than the previous edition due no doubt to the editors' sagacity in combining an increased range of subject matter with a reduction in the number of contributors. The coverage of epilepsy in developing countries has been expanded; this will do little to improve the book as far as most British and North American neurologists are concerned and presumably is designed to widen its international appeal. Cleland and Espir's

coverage of "some aspects of epilepsy in women" is a welcome and much needed addition to the book. Problems relating to pregnancy, contraception and possible catamenial influences in epileptics are common and interesting aspects of any neurologist's out-patient practice. Notably these authors are less concerned about the teratogenic potential of sodium valproate than other authorities have recently been.¹

Clinicians will reach for a particular textbook as a matter of habit if they find it provides ready answers to difficult or obscure questions. I was surprised that this book did not mention porphyria which is a recognised metabolic precipitant of seizures, a diagnostic consideration in status epilepticus and a consequence of enzyme induction by most anticonvulsant drugs. Of course porphyria itself is rare, and its epileptic consequences rarer still. But a large textbook should cover such rarities and, for instance, advice that valproate and clonazepam are the anticonvulsants of choice in patients susceptible to porphyria. Despite these quibbles, this is a good and useful book which now faces competition in the British market.

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Reference

- 1 Dalassio DJ. Seizure disorders in pregnancy. *N Engl J Med* 1985;312:559-63.

Ultrastructural Study of the Human Diseased Peripheral Nerve. 2nd ed. By Claude Vital, Jean-Michel Vallat. (Pp 289; \$58.00.) Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1987.

This second edition is a considerable improvement, both in presentation and content, on the previous volume. In 18 generously illustrated chapters the authors describe the main ultrastructural features of peripheral neuropathy. Very wisely they begin by giving the reader some advice about the use of peripheral nerve biopsy as well as about the techniques for performing it.

The first chapters on the morphology and development of the nerve are particularly welcome mainly if one considers that the readership will certainly include beginners in the field who will need to refer to normal features and to know the origin of the

various components of the nerve in order to understand the pathological processes.

Chapter 3 which deals with the morphometry should, in my opinion, have included more information. As it stands, it can only hint at the complexity of the subject and its invaluable contribution to the diagnosis of numerous peripheral neuropathies.

The many illustrations in Chapter 5 thoroughly complete the text in giving a satisfactory account of the basic pathological features. This is followed by other chapters in which the lesions in specific neuropathies are described. In these the reader can appreciate, on one hand, how much progress has been made in recent years towards the understanding of peripheral neuropathies (I refer among others to the group of diseases associated with dysglobulinaemia) or, on the other hand, the amount of work still to be done before the pathogenesis of some lesions can be fully understood; this applies particularly to diabetic neuropathy and in the relevant chapter the reader will find an up-to-date account of various possibilities. However, amyloidosis is dealt with rather briefly and one would have liked more details and information on a subject, the importance of which extends well beyond the peripheral nerve.

In conclusion, this is a book which will certainly be appreciated for focusing our attention on many problems related to peripheral nerve pathology and also for the numerous illustrations of good quality. These are assets which, coupled with a rich and updated bibliography and the low price, will certainly make us forgive the sometimes unclear text and repetitions and imprecisions of legends.

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