Book reviews

More Dilemmas in the Management of the Neurological Patient. Edited by Charles Warlow and John Garfield. (Pp 212; £22.50.) Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, 1987.

The first edition of *Dilemmas* was very well received; this second one follows within three years, an indication of its popularity. Like its predecessor its origins are to be found in Oxford where a lively two day series of debates were contrived for this purpose; the contributors, suitably chastened by their inquisitors, were then persuaded to put pen to paper.

There are 26 contributions containing a balanced mixture of neurology and neurosurgery. The range of topics is wide. All are of immediate interest and importance. The range of subjects includes inter alia: Bacterial meningitis—which antibiotic? Psycho-surgery: what proof is there of its value? When should spinal extradural metastases be treated surgically? Levodopa or bromocriptine for Parkinson's disease: which, how much and when? Do anticonvulsants influence the natural history of epilepsy? Can the course of multiple sclerosis be predicted? Should optic neuritis be treated?

Without exception these contributions make sound, informative good reading: some are stimulating and mildly provocative. For my taste others could have been more provocative: conclusions that "the ultimate answer will lie in more, or in better controlled trials" sound lame and unnecessarily defensive in a book of this type. The point of the exercise should be to indicate what the author and most of us have to do in practice, on the basis of existing evidence, whilst awaiting results of such trials. As Warlow and Garfield point out "certain knowledge is dull, while the uncertain is entertaining." But, it goes further than that. Not only books, but clinical teaching founded on certain knowledge can certainly be uninspiring, and patients' pressing illnesses continually dictate the clinical necessity for informed conjecture, for inspired speculation.

To what extent are current dilemmas resolved by these essays? Tentative solutions suggest we should treat TIAs with aspirin in a dose of 1000–1300 mg/d; that cerebral blood flow studies do not materially help the clinician; a synthesis of neural and vascular theories best explains migraine; many unruptured angiomas may be best left untreated; decompressive surgery has a

place within the first week of incomplete traumatic paraplegia although neurological recovery is unaltered. At a more technical level the arachnoiditis demonstrable in two-thirds of cases after myodil (iopendylate) myelography has not been a feature of non-ionic contrast media; the advantages of ambulatory EEG monitoring outweigh the time and costs it demands.

It is a pleasure to have these and other controversies served up as such palatable fare. The volume is well produced, clearly illustrated and contains a judicious selection of references to allow the reader to pursue the individual issues under debate. In the face of an ever increasing mass of medical papers of very varying quality, it is refreshing to find topics of importance selected and discussed and the exercise of clinical criticism displayed.

JMS PEARCE

Essentials of Clinical MRI. Edited by H M Falke. (Pp 235; £49.50.) Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987.

This book is made up of the lectures given at a recent course organised by the faculty of medicine of a Dutch university. Emphasis is laid throughout on the clinical usefulness of MRI, and the organisers clearly intended the course to provide a comprehensive "state of the art" appraisal. The 27 lectures are grouped under five headings, namely general principles (physics and potential hazards), neuro imaging, cardiovascular imaging, abdominal imaging and musculoskeletal imaging. Of the lectures, three were technical and 10 were concerned with the imaging of the brain and spinal cord; together they comprise 50% of the book.

The neuro imaging section includes several useful papers which blend personal experience with the results of comparative studies of MRI and other methods such as CT and PET. The following points are made: MRI, in addition to providing "bread and butter" imaging in demyelinating diseases, may be uniquely successful in revealing small acoustic neuromas (including intracanalicular), as well as degenerative diseases of white matter and medial temporal sclerosis, Wilson's disease and Huntington's disease, all of which CT fails to show. Recent advances such as enhancement with gadolinium-DTPA and sodium and chemical shift imaging enable MRI to contribute to the differentiation between oedema and infarction, between tumour and surrounding oedema, between glial scar and

small glioma, and between fat and lipid (allowing certain metabolites to be identified). No major clinical use has yet emerged for spectroscopy. The message is clear that MRI possesses greater sensitivity and specificity in a number of defined diagnostic areas, in which experience with CT has been disappointing. Spinal MRI is a good example: the "full-length, horizontal" view of the spinal cord and surrounding structures is attractive and useful to surgeons; it is this similar to but more accurate than myelography.

Armchair MRI watchers may be deterred from buying this book by its high price. The individual papers, typewritten and unedited, have a patchy quality, and the contents of several would have been improved by the use of standard medical English. There are "better buy" books on the market now which cost less.

E H BURROWS

Neurotoxins and their Pharmacological Implications. (A Biological Council Symposium.) Edited by Peter Jenner. (Pp 315; \$54.00.) New York: Raven Press, 1987.

This book makes intriguing reading for anyone interested in mechanisms of neural cell damage. Selective vulnerability of neurons is discussed early with particular reference to anoxia, epilepsy and hypoglycaemia and the differing effects these have on the normal hippocampus and how this ties in with glutaminergic neurotransmission – the "excitotoxic" theory. Strategies for blocking such triggering events are given, for instance using glutamate receptor antagonists (which include some anaesthetics) and damage limitation by reducing the harmful effects mediated by calcium, lipid oxidation and cytotoxic proteins is discussed. In other chapters the background and current classification of the excitatory amino acid receptors are described and the hypothesis expanded to include mechanisms of cell dysfunction in many other neurological conditions such as spasticity, Huntington's chorea and cerebellar degenerations.

There are several chapters discussing a large variety of toxins from spiders, sea anemone, bees and snakes and how they can be used to analyse ion channels, neuronal nicotinic receptors and glutamate receptors. These may be of passing interest to most clinicians although some will be interested to hear that histrionicotoxin is not the aetiological agent responsible for myalgic

encephalomyelitis. Capsaicin, produced by peppers, gets a chapter to itself as a sensory neurotoxin specifically damaging nociceptive neurons, particularly those containing substance P and other neuropeptides. Dioxin, a contaminant of Agent Orange, is reported as producing forms of dystonia which is fascinating if confirmed. There is a helpful chapter on botulinus toxin which will need to be read by anyone using this for the treatment of focal dystonia and will be of interest to others. There are three excellent chapters on MPTP giving its history, discussions on the animal model, the proposed mechanisms of such selective damage, and the MAO connection; all are excellent though admittedly much of this information is fairly easily available elsewhere.

The book will be required reading for anyone interested in neurotoxicology or in investigating mechanisms of cell death. Most clinical neurologists will be interested to browse through it for an hour or two. These are exciting times in neurology and reading this excellent book quickly demonstrates how over the next few years we are likely to see very substantial advances in understanding mechanisms of neural cell damage and death and how best to take avoiding action.

AC WILLIAMS

Pain—mechanisms and management. By Howard L Fields. (Pp 354; £39.00.) Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Book Co (UK) Ltd, 1987.

With the enormous increase in pain research in the fields of anatomy, physiology, pharmacology and biochemistry, coupled with the proliferation of methods for pain relief, it is surprising that any individual is now capable of producing an authoritative overall view of the subject of pain. In this book Howard Fields shows that it is possible. He gives us a coherent, well-balanced and above all clear account of modern ideas about pain, ranging from basic research, through psychological aspects of pain, to a practical approach to management of patients with pain. The brief introduction is concerned with definition and description of pain, the major neural pathways involved, and the factors involved in the experience of pain. There follow chapters on the anatomy, physiology and pharmacology of pain in the intact nervous system and then consideration of pain mechanisms in the damaged nervous system. Throughout, Fields enhances the text with well chosen case his-

tories. In addition to a consideration of the psychology of pain, there are chapters on patient evaluation, analgesic drugs, other drugs sometimes useful for their analgesic effect and non drug methods for pain control. Finally, there is a summary chapter on a general approach to comprehensive pain management.

The scope of this book is immense. Fields has succeeded in conveying a vast amount of information in a small space without obscuring the important and controversial issues. The illustrations are excellent and for a book of this size, it is generously referenced. The book is a delight to read and for the new student of pain, it cannot be recommended too highly. For all those dealing with pain problems, this book will provide a valuable and easily accessible source of information.

JW SCADDING

Neurolaryngology: Recent Advances. Edited by Minoru Hirano, John A Kirchner and Diane M Bless. (Pp 281; £34.00.) Basingstoke: Taylor and Francis, 1987.

It is never easy to give the proceedings of a symposium the semblance of a balanced textbook, but the editors of this Japanese conference, held in 1986, have succeeded remarkably well. All but one of the contributors were Japanese yet the English translations are crisp, idiomatic and coherent. That must be a tribute to the work of the single American participant Dr Kirchner, and his coeditor Dr Bless. The result is a thoroughly satisfactory and workmanlike discussion of the vast topic of neurolaryngology, which could well serve as a basic text for any newcomer to the field. The purely scientific sections on anatomy, and neurophysiology are highly informative, and offer valuable access to descriptions of techniques, such as those used in axonal tracing. There is clinical information on prognostic aspects of electrophysiological testing, and the relationship between fundamental physiological knowledge and its application to the damaged larynx. An excellent chapter by Professor Hirano lays Semon's law logically to rest. The use of purely anatomical study is indicated by the comments, in a discussion on brain stem disease, about the selective damage which the nucleus ambiguus may suffer, because of the topographical arrangement of its neurons.

The papers here are based on studies on cats, dogs and man. The similarities between the action of laryngeal muscles in dogs and man is mentioned, but it would be useful for the reader to learn rather more about the differences between the species, than is discussed.

There is virtually no space allocated to therapeutic issues—apart from brief mention of voice training and augmentation of the paralysed cord. The interested reader will have to look elsewhere.

In short I can strongly recommend this book as a useful guide to the subject of neurolaryngology, with congratulations to the editors on its uniformity of style.

H LUDMAN

Early Detection and Management of Cerebral Palsy. Edited by H Galjaard, HFR Prechtl, M Velickovic. (Pp 149; £46.50.) Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987.

Unfortunately this small book does not live up to the expectation from its title and editors. There are some very good chapters by individuals (B Hagberg on epidemiology, S Levitt on management and D Morris on emotional aspects) but as a whole the book does not hang together. There are articles dealing very peripherally with the subject such as prenatal detection of genetic disease and the ultrasonography of malformation which although quite good themselves are entirely out of place. Some of the chapters are obviously translated unfortunately rather poorly.

There are articles on prediction of cerebral palsy and antenatal factors (but the National Collaborative Study is hardly mentioned). However there is very little of the early diagnosis of cerebral palsy for the practitioner nor any attempt to evaluate intervention.

No book of this size on cerebral palsy could be comprehensive, but it is difficult for the reader picking up the book to know what it covers. It really is a series of articles on the subject which I believe has not been edited tightly enough. Perhaps I expected too much.

SH GREEN