interleukins. Mediators play a role in the 2', 5' oligoadenylate synthetase and protein kinase systems as intracellular mediators of their effects; perhaps the most important point to emerge from the neurological chapters—amounting to nearly half the book—is that alpha and beta differ from gamma interferon in their structure and partially antagonistic actions. In the clinical context, interferons cannot therefore be considered as a functionally homogenous group of substances differing only in their method of production; dose-response effects also need to be assessed.

There is a useful chapter on the systemic effects of interferons, important in so far as they account for many of the symptoms associated with viral infection and also complicate effective blinding in placebo controlled clinical trials. This is relevant to the subsequent handling of the neurological trials, some constituting no more than preliminary anecdotal studies involving 2–3 patients treated on an open basis. Experimental studies on rabcubs now indicate that the antiviral properties of interferon are useless once the virus has started to replicate in the central nervous system and suggest that interferon will at best supplement but not replace conventional vaccines. The evidence that interferon alpha or beta influence the unpredictable course of subacute sclerosing panencephalitis or malignant brain tumours is difficult to assess and it is unimpressive in the case of motor neurone disease. Those familiar with the published studies of interferon beta (good), gamma (bad) and alpha (indifferent) in the treatment of multiple sclerosis will not find new information except recent follow up figures for the study of intrathecal beta interferon, first presented in 1981. It is not yet clear whether the reported reduction in relapse rate means much in terms of the accumulation of disability—recent epidemiological studies suggest that this may be so—or represents more of a decline than is to be expected as part of the natural history. The book is well referenced but not perfectly proof read and there are many repetitions, even some within the same chapter. At £107.75, I suggest that Interferon Treatment of Neuromuscular Disorders will depend on libraries for its sales.

AIDS to the Examination of the Peripheral Nervous System. (Pp 61; £3.50.) Bailliere Tindall, 1989.

The late Hugh Garland taught that the competent clinical neurologist could manage well with only a superficial knowledge of the anatomy of the brain, but was rendered incompetent if ignorant of the peripheral nervous system and its examination. In the same spirit George Riddoch, Consultant Neurologist to the Army, in conjunction with Professor Learmonth of Edinburgh, set up in 1940 peripheral nerve injury centres at Gogarburn and Killearn. With help from Ritchie Russell and McArdle 20 copies of a loose-leaved guide was circulated. It was later developed, and published by the MRC as AIDS to the Investigation of Peripheral Nerve Injuries (War memorandum No. 7). Its importance in filling a real clinical niche has been reflected by its recognition as the standard work which has merited numerous reprints and revisions. The editorial Committee for the Guaranators of Brain under the Chairmanship of Sir John now Lord Walton took it over in 1984 and this new edition was published in 1986.

The format is essentially unchanged: a combination of excellent clinical photographs of muscles being tested, simple clear line diagrams of nerves and the muscles they supply, areas of sensory change with lesions of peripheral nerves, and a list of nerves and the main root supply of muscles. Captions are lucid and precise. The role of distinguished neurologists refining and honing this tool to an indispensable aid to every practising clinician is apparent. This reprint of the 1986 edition fulfils the best standards of its predecessors.

J M PEARCE


This book on imaging techniques of the central nervous system, lungs, cardiovascular system and the abdomen includes ultrasound, computerised tomography (CT), magnetic resonance (MRI) and the use of isotopes.

In the section on neuroradiology half the text is devoted to technological aspects and a little over five pages to the radiology of life threatening procedures. It is a pity that the opportunity to indicate the role of imaging in this situation is rather cursorily dealt with.

The section on magnetic resonance of the heart is an extremely good review of the users of MRI but does not particularly pertain to investigation in an intensive care unit. It is unfortunate that contra-indications relating to the use of MRI in patients with pacemakers and the difficulties in scanning patients on ventilators are not mentioned in this chapter, though they are referred to elsewhere in the book.

The chapter on ultrasound is poorly represented, with no headings; the wording is unusual and there are errors in the text. There is no mention of the requirement for a full bladder in pelvic scanning and indeed the examination of the pelvis is limited to four lines. There is also the interesting suggestion that a plain radiograph is necessary prior to ultrasound, a view that is not universal.

The discussion on CT of the chest reads like a paper in a journal rather than a coherent review on the use of CT in ventilatory failure. There is a further chapter on mobile radiography which includes most of the common indications. Unfortunately one of the radiographs is printed upside down.

The techniques of isotope lung scanning are discussed in great detail, but unfortunately some of the images are poorly reproduced, although in reality this is true of many intensive care films. The chapter on positron emission tomography is interesting but irrelevant to most intensive care units in this country as cyclotrons are rarely available.

It is difficult to know at whom this book is directed. The detail is neither sufficient for radiologists nor does it provide adequate guidance for the clinician to indicate which investigation should be performed in a given situation. The book is quite expensive at £93 and we think it would be better if clinicians were to discuss cases with their radiological colleagues, who should guide them to appropriate investigations in critically ill patients. Unfortunately a golden opportunity has been missed.

D P E KINGSLEY S RANKIN


Presenting conference proceedings in book format is becoming more and more popular. In general this is unfortunate as the opportunities for adequate editing and for including original material are small. In the vast majority of cases they result in books of short