
During the last two decades, there has been a very great increase in interest in neonatal neurology. This sprang partly from the fact that clinical symptoms and signs could be correlated now with conditions identified by the newer methods of imaging which in the past were mainly possible on post-mortem examination. Better intensive care also allowed many ill infants, both premature and those with neurological syndromes, to survive and pose their problems to the clinicians. Greater interest in the subject no doubt has also been fuelled by the increasing litigation in infants who present with neurological problems in the newborn period, as later problems of many of these infants are commonly attributed to the associated signs of perinatal asphyxia and thus assumed malpractice.

Dr Fenichel’s book was one of the first which tried to fill the gap in this field. The book, now in its 3rd edition, primarily aims to be a readable guide for clinicians and thus to concentrate on the clinical aspects of diagnostic assessment with a minimum of pathological background. The first chapter describes the neurological consultation. The following chapters deal with: seizures, disorders of movement, asphyxia, trauma and vascular disorders, infectious diseases, metabolic disorders, disorders of cerebral morphogenesis, hydrocephalus and congenital tumours, electroencephalography and evoked responses.

The neurological consultation gives a good practical approach to history taking, clinical examination and note taking. Probably more emphasis could be given to the importance of asking leading questions about trauma in pregnancy, delivery of the appropriate family tree, recurrent miscarriages, and still-births and neonatal death in the parents’ relatives. Abnormal postures in neonates are illustrated with diagrams. Though visual representation is always the best method, I wish that these diagrams would bear more resemblance to a neonate and his parents’ relations. The chapter on hypotonia reflects the author’s special interest in muscle disease and thus quite a lot of space is devoted to pathological illustrations and rare conditions.

This contrasts with the chapter on asphyxia which is relatively brief, taking into account that it is probably by far the most common condition that the average clinician is going to meet. There is also little information in this chapter to guide the clinician as to how various investigations might establish the timing of the insult which might be of medicolegal importance. I found the separation of the chapter on asphyxia away from birth trauma arbitrary and artificial. The chapters on hypoxic and metabolic disorders are excellent. The embryology and pathology in the disorders of cerebral morphogenesis and hydrocephalus are good and easily readable, though maybe too extensive for a book of this size. The chapter on electro-physiology is very informative. It is only a pity that no similar brief chapter was included on imaging.

This is a lucidly written book, though the clinician might have been greatly helped if some flow diagrams had been supplied to aid the differential diagnosis. It provides a readable and enjoyable introduction to the subject.

LILLY DUBOWITZ


There is a need for a concise and readable text book which can provide non-medical staff with a balanced introduction to the complexity, scope and achievements of modern paediatric surgery. Dr Leslie Ivan has attempted to fill this need, drawing on the experience of the staff of the Childrens Hospital of Eastern Ontario.

It is ironic that the book, whose title stresses a co-operative approach, suffers the problems of repetition and disparate content common to so many multi-author texts. Thus, the chapters vary from an excellent but rather advanced explanation of audiological testing to a discussion of speech therapy dominated by its own jargon—‘the dyspraxic patient demonstrates inconsistent errors as he gropes towards target phonemes when he undertakes volitional speech movements’. No small text book can escape oversimplification but there are several occasions where the authors of this book adopt a worryingly didactic approach, for example to the use of high dose steroids, barbiturates and hyperventilation in the management of raised intracranial pressure and head injury.

There are some omissions from the book which are surprising. The emphasis is very much on the role of professional hospital based health workers and it was therefore, disappointing to find no critical appraisal of their work. There is only brief mention of the role of parents, community services and self-help groups and no mention of the importance of clinical genetics and counselling. It is surprising to find that magnetic resonance imaging dealt with in a small addendum, despite publication in 1989.

Although this book contains much commonsense, it would be difficult to recommend it, at its present cost—$38.75—to those for whom it was intended.

RJ NELSON