BOOK REVIEWS

Concise Surgery of the Acute Abdomen

John A. Shepherd, M.D., F.R.C.S. (Pp. 208; £5·50.) Churchill Livingstone. 1975.

The diagnosis of the acute abdomen remains one of the bastions of clinical medicine. Armed only with his own senses, reinforced in some instances by some simple side-room laboratory tests and plain radiographs of the abdomen and chest, it behoves the general practitioner or surgical resident, there and then, to make what may often prove to be a life-saving decision. Whereas in so many other situations we may await the progress of events or delay management until sophisticated special investigations come through, this is rarely the case in the acute abdominal emergency. Fortunately for doctor and patient alike there has been a tradition in Great Britain of fine clinical teachers who have guided us by their spoken and written word in the importance of accurate early diagnosis and logical management.

Mr. John Shepherd has already earned his place in this respect with his monumental *Surgery of the Acute Abdomen*, which is encyclopaedic in its breadth. The present volume represents a concise text designed principally for students and surgical residents. It serves its purpose well as a brief and readable account of the diagnosis and management of these emergency conditions. After preliminary sections on general principles, the author discusses the major diseases on an anatomical basis; then chapters follow on intra-abdominal haemorrhage, gastrointestinal bleeding, and those medical conditions which simulate the acute abdomen. There is a final useful word of advice to young men who wish to publish reports on unusual cases. The author can be congratulated, once again, on making a useful contribution to a subject in which he already has an established reputation as a wise surgical teacher.

HAROLD ELLIS

Prostaglandins in Human Reproduction

Mostyn Embrey. (Pp. 104; £2·25.) Churchill Livingstone. 1975.

The output of literature on prostaglandins at present probably exceeds 200 papers annually. To attempt critical appraisal of even the reproductive aspects of prostaglandins in 90 small pages is no mean feat which would daunt most authors. However, by limiting his brief and aiming the book primarily at obstetricians and gynaecologists, Mr. Embrey, who himself has contributed much original work in this field, has achieved a useful summary of the papers of particular importance to his readers. This review of the literature underlines the fact that many clinical trials have been poorly designed (if at all) and largely uncontrolled. In consequence it is difficult to arrive at firm conclusions on the basis of the available data, but many readers might have welcomed a more didactic guide to clinical management based on Mr. Embrey's great personal practical experience.

In spite of the small size of the book the text is sometimes repetitive. The details of many small series of cases of induction are probably unnecessary and could be summarized in tables alone, with comment in the text. Of necessity in such a rapidly moving field of research and clinical development this book will have a limited life. Indeed, much of the methodology relating to radioimmunoassay has already been superseded. For the present and in the immediate future it will give students and clinicians, and especially those studying for higher examinations or writing commentaries, a useful starting point for updating their knowledge.

B. M. HIBBARD

Metabolic Disorders of Bone

C. R. Paterson, M.R.C.Path. (Pp. 373; £8·50.) Blackwell. 1974.

This attractive book should perhaps be regarded as a successor to the late Professor Fourman's popular textbook on calcium and bone metabolism, as it is written by one of Professor Fourman's previous collaborators. Like its predecessor it seeks to cover both calcium physiology and clinical disorders and does so with considerable success.

The opening chapter is a condensed but far from superficial review of physiological aspects with a proper emphasis on the central role of parathyroid hormone and vitamin D. This is followed by sections on the clinical features of metabolic bone disease and the investigation of metabolic bone disease which are clear, straightforward, and sensible. Subsequent chapters deal with hypo- and hyper-parathyroidism, hypo- and hyper-calcaemia, osteomalacia, osteoporosis, Paget's disease, and some rarer bone diseases. There is a useful appendix on commercially available and standard preparations for the management of metabolic bone disease, which unfortunately includes no dosages, 80 pages of well-chosen references, and a reasonable index. A striking feature of this volume is the excellence of its physical production. The illustrations, many of them taken from Professor Fourman's book, are large and attractive, and the presentation as a whole is eminently readable.

The subject matter is largely non-controversial. This is a middle-of-the-road piece of work presenting a rather conventional picture of the subject, which is very appropriate to the general reader and should be popular among non-specialists. In particular it skates lightly over some of the more difficult aspects of calcium metabolism, keeping speculation to a minimum. This perhaps reflects the fact that the author is a close and competent observer of the calcium scene rather than a committed participant.

It follows that some readers may feel vaguely dissatisfied when they put down what is clearly an attractive and readable book. The increased pyrophosphate excretion of patients with hypophosphatasia is briefly described, but no attempt is made to explain it. The account of urinary hydroxyproline is rather weak and seriously underrates the value of this measurement. The author does not seem to have appreciated fully the way in which calcium absorption can be determined with radioactive calcium. Kinetic studies are given rather short shrift. The steroid suppression test for hypercalcaemia is described without any attempt to explain how or why it works. The analysis of tubular reabsorption of calcium is really very cursory. The chapter on osteoporosis is rather sketchy considering that it is by far the most common bone disorder which the average physician is likely to encounter.

However, these are minor blemishes which will probably not be apparent to most readers of what is basically a very attractive piece of work. On the whole the author has shown good judgement in the selection and presentation of his material. His book may not have the maturity of its predecessor, but it is, if anything, more readable and is likely to be just as popular.

B. E. C. NORDIN

Artificial Liver Support

Proceedings of an International Symposium on Artificial Support Systems for Acute Hepatic Failure. Ed. Roger Williams and Iain M. Murray-Lyon. (Pp. 367; £9.) Pitman Medical. 1975.

The mortality rate in fulminant liver failure remains at 80% despite all effort and innovation. One of the most interesting new therapeutic developments has been the introduction of an artificial liver support system, the rationale being that the liver has considerable capacity for regeneration. The hope is that if the patient can be tided over the acute episode recovery might be complete.

In September 1974 an international symposium was held to discuss artificial support systems for acute liver failure, and the proceedings are now available. Let me assure those readers who feel there has been an excess of published conferences that this volume will repay reading. Inevitably it is of a specialized nature, with much space being devoted to the development of materials used in haemoperfusion and in particular the coated charcoal which is at present under study. But there is much else of interest, including a section on those changes in liver

failure which require correction though unfortunately the reader does not derive any clear concept of the basic mechanisms in liver failure, liver regeneration, cerebral oedema in liver failure, and the use of charcoal haemoperfusion in acute poisoning.

The quality of the contributions is excellent, the book reads easily and clearly, and the reports of discussions, which can so often be turgid and incomprehensible, have been edited to a high standard, with the retention of only short, pertinent comments. One is left with the final question: Is artificial liver support the answer? Perhaps, but let us hope that despite the obvious problems some form of controlled therapeutic trial will be organized by those physicians who see many patients, lest this technique receive premature acclamation only to be followed by the disappointments which we have seen with corticosteroids, exchange transfusion, and heparin therapy.

IAN A. D. BOUCHIER

An Introduction to Electrocardiography

John Hamer, F.R.C.P. (Pp. 125; £2·75.) Pitman Medical. 1975.

A book on the simplest principles of electrocardiography has long been needed, and when presented in this attractive and readable way it has instant appeal. Addressed primarily to residents and senior house officers, its use in most general hospitals is assured. Particularly it will interest those seeking to clarify their understanding, for example, of electrical axes or of the genesis of the patterns of hypertrophy and bundle branch block. While one can criticize the superficial explanations given for the causes of ST segment shifts and of T wave inversions, these are faults in the right direction, since this simplicity avoids the obscurantism of some other primers on the subject.

There is one unfortunate error. Fig. 42 is labelled and explained as constrictive pericarditis, but in my opinion the E.C.G. pattern is due to dextrocardia. There are also a few over-dogmatic interpretations of some arrhythmias.

This little book fills a real need, and generally the 65 illustrations are excellent and clear. It deserves to be read widely by medical students and general practitioners, to whom it should be most valuable, as well as doctors in hospital medicine.

M. F. OLIVER

Primary Care: Where Medicine Fails

Ed. Spyros Andreopoulos. (Pp. 212; £5·40.) John Wiley. 1975.

Between 1931 and 1963 the gross number of general practitioners in the United States was halved and the number per head of population reduced by two-thirds. At the time this was in general considered to be a good thing; not only were general practitioners out of date, they were dangerous. During the subsequent decade the declining trend in both these statistics continued unchanged, but now it has aroused an increasing amount of national concern, and that is what this book is about.

It is a carefully edited report of a small conference of 27 interested people, which was sponsored by a private foundation. Five essays by Stanley Berger, Karen Davis, Merlin Du Val, Charles (Chuck) Lewis, and Alberta Parker make up the bulk of the book. There is also a synopsis of formal and informal discussion of the essays and of the conclusions and recommendations of the group as a whole. The topics covered include an exhaustive review of the nature of primary care in the U.S.A., a discussion of how to make it accessible to all patients (which among many other things considers the influence of doctors' wives and families on the plans of manpower planners); another on the organization of the primary care team, and an analysis of the problems of financing medical care in the U.S.A. in the future.

The book is by Americans about America. And it is written in American too. For instance, the unwary Briton could be excused for thinking that a "physician visit" is an M.R.C.P.'s domiciliary call, whereas in fact it is a visit by a patient to a doctor in the doctor's consulting room or in a hospital. The contents also one suspects are more for Americans than for the world at large. The book is scholarly, but the problems with which it is concerned are so fundamentally different from those we face on this side of the Atlantic that it is more likely to be of interest to planners, academics, and theorists than to those here whose chief task is to deliver primary care.

ROY M. ACHESON

Chlorpromazine in Psychiatry

A Study of Therapeutic Innovation. Judith P. Swazey. (Pp. 340; £8·75.) M.I.T. Press. 1974.

When I began to review this book I admit that I did my best to be biased. I failed. I failed because, far from being a sales-promotion exercise as I feared it might be, it turned out to be a first-class piece of scholarship with the added attractions that the book is elegantly produced and the author, Professor Judith Swazey, writes well.

The history of the synthesis of chlorpromazine could be likened to an account in the most intimate detail of how a complex tapestry came to be made. In this instance, the first strands were woven in 1883 by August Bernthsen in Heidelberg when he succeeded in synthesizing phenothiazines, though the frame, or part of it at least, was built by an English chemist, William Perkin. His pioneer work was responsible for the foundation of the synthetic dye industry in 1856, an industry in which England led and then, as frequently happens, failed to exploit her initial advantage. After 1870 she fell behind in the international race. From then on, mainly in Europe, every scientific discipline—organic chemistry, pharmacology, physiology, neurophysiology, biochemistry, clinical medicine, and surgery—took a hand. Each contribution, idiosyncratic and recognizable, was added under the aegis of either academic and industrial research laboratories or research institutes which became concerned for varying motives, not necessarily commercial. Sir Henry Dale, for example, added his quota primarily to "learn more about nature." However, it is undoubtedly the French who between October and December 1950 tied all the strands together and succeeded in finally evolving a centrally-active phenothiazine amine, chlorpromazine.

Serendipity is given the credit for the introduction of so many therapeutic procedures in psychiatry, but it was not quite so with chlorpromazine. French research workers recognized its "unique sedative effects" and used it as a potentiating drug in both sleep therapy and with barbiturates in the treatment of manic patients. Professor Swazey is, however, at pains to give credit where she thinks credit is due, or overdue, to Henri Laborit, who, she maintains, urged that the drug be used in psychiatry in the early 1950s. In 1952 the firm of Rhône-Poulenc marketed the drug as Largactil ("large activity"). From then on the use of the drug under various names spread throughout the civilized world like a whirlwind and engulfed the treatment of the whole spectrum of psychiatric disorders. For instance, in the U.S.A. under the name thorazine it was being given to an estimated two million patients within eight months of its introduction there in 1954.

Professor Swazey does not pretend to assess the clinical value of chlorpromazine and the ever increasing family of drugs it has spawned. She quotes the mass media's extravagant descriptions—"fantastic," "versatile," a "miracle drug" that "melts away anxiety." But these are not her expressions. She indeed is most cautious and cites a variety of pertinent questions, including the vital—Can we evaluate the effects of tranquillizing drugs on the natural history of schizophrenia? And that asked by G. L. Klerman in 1961 in his follow-up of discharged patients—"Or are we not merely shifting the burden of psychiatric care from the State hospital to public welfare and social agencies?"

There are other questions, particularly related to irreversible damage to the central nervous system, which must be answered before the lasting value of this epoch-making psychopharmacological tapestry can be assessed. The answers will emerge only with the wear and tear of history.

HENRY R. ROLLIN

In *The Origins and History of the Forest Group of Hospitals* Dr. A. E. Dormer briefly describes the history of a group of hospitals in the area of Epping Forest. He has dug out some interesting statistics and woven a good story about them, but what distinguishes his 24-page booklet above all is a large number of remarkable old photographs that he has included. Many of them catch the flavour of earlier times. The whole booklet is well produced and is obtainable for 75p from the Medical Education Centre, Whipps Cross Hospital, London E11 1NR. Any profits will help to finance an extension to the centre.

SELECTED TITLES

Radiation Science at the National Physical Laboratory 1912-1955. E. E. Smith. (Pp. 114; £5.) H.M.S.O. 1975.

The Biology of God. Alister Hardy. (Pp. 238; £4·50.) Jonathan Cape. 1975.