Book Reviews

Sleep and Breathing in Children. A Developmental Approach
Lung Biology in Health and Disease, Vol. 147
By Gerald Loughlin, John Carroll, and Carol Marcus, Editors
ISBN 0 8247 0300 6

This book is one of the recent volumes in the Lung Biology in Health and Disease series. These ‘white books’ provide up-to-date detailed information on a whole range of respiratory topics. It is an excellent series known to all respiratory specialists but is notoriously expensive. This volume is no exception at $235.00, a lot of money for a book that covers one area of practice only. However it is value for money, considering the large number of international contributors who have written almost 900 pages containing many useful and often recent references.

The editors are well known experts in the field of sleep medicine and work at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore, USA. The book has five sections: Sleep, Breathing, Sleep Disorders, Abnormal Breathing During Sleep, and Technological Advances in Diagnosis and Management. There is a large section devoted to normal sleep and breathing physiology, before pathological states are discussed.

The chapters that were orientated to underlying conditions were particularly useful as an information source. These covered chronic lung diseases, neuromuscular disease, genetic syndromes, and sickle cell disease. I also found the sections on sudden infant death syndrome useful as we often investigate ‘near misses’ but rarely find a cause.

I suspect this book is aimed at tertiary respiratory paediatricians, and particularly those that run a sleep service. It would certainly also be of interest to those who work in the neurodevelopmental field, as abnormal regulation of sleep and breathing is increasingly recognized as an important component in those with neurological disorders.

Ian Balfour-Lynn

Cerebral Palsies: Epidemiology & Causal Pathways
By Fiona Stanley, Eve Blair, and Eva Alberman
Mac Keith Press (Clinics in Developmental Medicine, No. 151) distributed by Cambridge University Press. 2000 pp 250, £45.00, US$76.50
ISBN 1 898 68320 4

This eagerly awaited book builds on the solid foundations of its precursor The Epidemiology of the Cerebral Palsies (1984), which encouraged collaborative efforts in the setting up of registers of children with cerebral palsy. The intention was to collect data on sufficient numbers of children with similar conditions to permit useful aetiological studies. This book shows the progress so far and highlights the way ahead.

Like the good epidemiologists that these authors are, they recognize that many of the difficulties experienced in trying to come to terms with the aetiology of the cerebral palsies still lie in problems associated with definitions.

The authors have also clearly defined the epidemiological methods that they recommend to investigate causation. Accordingly, they devote the first five chapters to preparing their readers to tackle critically the succeeding ones dealing with specific cases of causal pathways associated with low birthweight, intrauterine growth restriction, birth asphyxia, and multiple pregnancy. Postulated preconceptional and post-neonatal causes are treated to the same rigorous assessment.

Looking to the future they review the recent physiological work on the prevention of secondary neuronal damage in infants with neonatal encephalopathy, with a variety of agents suggested as possibly blocking pathways to apoptotic neuronal death.

The prevention of postneonatally acquired cerebral palsy is reviewed and not surprisingly, contributes significantly to a useful list of preventive strategies that are considered effective.

In the context of future research, the authors urge us to think in terms of causal pathways with the potential for intervention at different stages and to respond to the recently available techniques in genetics, imaging and neurobiology.

This is a thought provoking, readable and well produced book which I thoroughly recommend.

Lesley Mutch

Treatment of Child Abuse. Common Ground for Mental Health, Medical and Legal Practitioners
By Robert Reece, Editor
Johns Hopkins University Press. 2000 pp 378, £50.50, US$65.00
ISBN 0 8018 6320 1

Since the 1960s, the literature on child abuse has concentrated on the recognition and means of establishing diagnosis of the various forms of child maltreatment. To date, most of the attention has focused on sexual and physical abuse with researchers on each type of abuse working relatively independently.

In editing this book, Robert Reece has successfully managed to bring together issues of common interest to practitioners in the fields of medicine, mental health, and the law. At first glance the title implies treatment issues or a medical model. However, the book covers the intervening period between diagnosis and outcome.

In 25 chapters, 4 categories of abuse are addressed: sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, and Munchausen syndrome by proxy. Multiple traumatization is covered in a separate section. Within each section, a brief introduction addresses an overview of the problem, followed by management in the initial postdiagnostic period, long-term medical consequences, psychosocial treatment and the medico-legal aspects of child abuse.

Part 6 of the book is entitled ‘Disposition Issues’ and covers the treatment of offenders, and management of treatment-resistant families. The final part on ‘Child Maltreatment and Society’, addresses the consequences of childhood victimization. Current concerns and challenges in child abuse treatment research are summarized in the final chapter.

As a paediatrician, I found chapter 23 most interesting as it addressed the medico-legal aspects of child abuse. It is written from a legal viewpoint, but gives very useful tips on confidentiality and how to give expert testimony in court.

The main strength of the book is its multidisciplinary collaboration. It is a useful text book for practitioners in one
field wishing to understand the thinking and working of their colleagues in another.

My criticisms arise from the fact that this is an American text, with references citing mainly American research. Throughout the book American terminology and legal practices are discussed, making the book less useful to a reader who is unfamiliar with the American way of life. As in all multi-authored texts, there is the inevitable overlap and repetition.

On balance, this book is an innovative approach, and should serve to foster better understanding of interagency working in child protection.

Jacqueline Mok

The Biology of the Autistic Syndromes (3rd edn)
By Christopher Gillberg and Mary Coleman
Mac Keith Press, (Clinics in Developmental Medicine No. 135/4) distributed by Cambridge University Press, 2000 pp 330, $60.00, US$95.0 ISBN 1 898683 22 0

Do you want to know the latest about the prevalence of autism, its many causes, review its symptomatology, know what tests to order, or the most up-to-date treatments? If so, this is the book to have on your shelf.

Written by a child psychiatrist and a child neurologist who have collaborated through three editions of this book, it presents in 330 pages their thoroughly revised view of autism. Each has evaluated hundreds of children with the disorder and is therefore acutely aware of the wide range of its clinical presentations and varied aetiologies.

In their introduction they emphasize that the umbrella term ‘autistic spectrum’, with its wide range of symptoms and severity, covers many biologically distinct syndromes. Later, they make the distinction between autistic syndromes, which refers to individuals without a medically diagnosable condition (‘primary’ or idiopathic autism) and the diseases entities of autism. These are individuals with an autistic behavioural phenotype in the context of a well established medical condition that is not necessarily associated with autism (the authors speak of ‘double syndromes’ in such cases).

The book is especially strong on epidemiology, clinical, and neuropsychologic descriptions of classical disorders on the autistic spectrum, like Asperger syndrome. It has tables that list the many often confusing terms used to refer to disorders on the autistic spectrum and the many disorders that have been associated with autism. It includes an exhaustive review of non-genetic, cytogenetic, and single gene defects reported in one or more individuals with autism.

The implication throughout is not that conditions like fragile-X, Rett, or Angleman syndromes are alternative diagnoses to autism, but that they are among the conditions associated with or responsible for the autistic behavioural phenotype in some persons. This is an important concept that is not widely understood and leads to much confusion.

Chapters on management cover both psychotropic drugs and educational interventions. The importance of honesty and clarity in providing parents with the diagnosis of an autistic spectrum disorder is emphasized, as are the needs of families for psychosocial support, respite care, and early comprehensive educational intervention.

This is without question the book I would recommend to all professionals concerned with a state-of-the-art review of the autistic syndromes. It is readable, eschews jargon, and excessive verbiage, is based on extensive clinical experience, is catholic and logical in its views, and is eminently practical for the clinician. Its coverage of most areas is broad enough for the researcher who wants to be brought up to speed in understanding this complex disorder. There are more detailed papers and books on particular aspects of autism, but for an overall high quality review, this one is peerless.

Isabelle Rapin

Addendum

‘Monozygotic boys with fragile X syndrome’
DMCN 42: 768–74

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