

survey of 250 adult asthmatics. She reiterated Dr Holzel's plea that the child with recurrent wheezy bronchitis was really asthmatic. Corticosteroids (she preferentially used prednisone) were invaluable in the treatment of severe asthmatics. In her view there were three occasions in which immediate treatment with corticosteroids was mandatory; status asthmaticus, when there was danger of death because of recurrent attacks and in severe chronic asthma. In status, there was no response to bronchodilators and oxygen deficiency was present. There was a real danger of death. The treatment was intravenous hydrocortisone 100mg. repeated hourly until clinical improvement occurred. If the patient was already on steroids, then the initial dose should be 500mg. In her experience there was more harm in underdosing than overdosing. Many patients showed clinical improvement; felt better and seemed better, long before physiological normality was restored. It was her experience that serious side-effects were uncommon on long-term low-dosage treatment. She found in her cases that side-effects came in three groups. In the first group peptic ulcer and bleeding were the most dramatic and seemed to appear at any time during treatment; in one case it had appeared after 15 years. Also in this group were loss of height, collapsed vertebra and osteoporosis, tuberculosis, diabetes, ocular and mental disorders and benign hypertension. In the second group were those with the more familiar complications of water retention, low plasma potassium, obesity, and the Cushingoid appearance. The third complication was death. In her series of 250, 33 (2 per cent) had died in the 15 years, and of these, 15 were due to status asthmaticus.

There followed a panel discussion with questions from the floor. This was much livelier than in the morning, and a large number of questions and answers was forthcoming. One question involving the use of Intal was ably answered 'off the cuff' by Dr Davies, who had worked in the Asthma Research Unit at Cardiff.

The chairman gave a succinct summing up of the meeting, and thanked the speakers, sponsors and organizers. Dr Parry proposed a vote of thanks.

#### Acknowledgements

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H. CAIRNS

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## Book reviews

**The teachings of don Juan: A Yaqui way of knowledge.** CARLOS CASTANEDA. Harmondsworth, Middlesex. Penguin Books. 1970. Pp. 252. Price 5s. 0d. (25p).

Carlos Castaneda, a student of ethnology at the University of California, travelled into the south west of the United States to gain information on the medical plants used by the Indians in that area. On one of his trips he was introduced to don Juan as a man wise in the use of plants particularly peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*), a hallucigenic drug. He learnt apparently nothing of the medical uses of this or any other drug. Under the tutorlage of don Juan, Carlos was slowly, over five years of intermittent study, initiated into the rites of the Yaqui sorcery. He took daily notes of his experiences and as

soon as possible enlarged these into coherent statements. Don Juan was an educated Indian who spoke Spanish well, but the law of the tribe was deeply embedded in his mind. The value of this book is in its description of the mental attitude of the sorcerer, which was that of all primitive people. All objects, plants and minerals, were imbued with life, with personality and the power to good or harm.

In the process of his initiation, Carlos was obliged to undergo ritual ingestion of peyote, datura and a mushroom vaguely identified as *Psilocybe mexicana*. It is evident, though not stated, that don Juan sometimes induced hypnosis in his subject. What Carlos in a rare understatement calls the 'state of non-ordinary reality', was induced in a ritual manner with all these

plants. The type of hallucination produced differed with each, and appears to have retained its own characteristics. Is this indeed so? Interesting, but so is the whole book and well worth reading for that alone.

**The diagnosis and treatment of diseases affecting the nervous system.** FREDERICK LEES, M.B., M.R.C.P., D.C.H., M.P.S. London. Staples Press. 1970. Pp. xxix+982. Price £8.

This large textbook produced in two volumes is a newcomer in the field of neurology and the author, in the presentation of his subject, departs from the more usual format of such books. Volume I is divided into two parts, the first being concerned with discussion of the main causes of common neurological symptoms arranged in regional or typographical manner. Towards the end of Part I short surveys of common clinical relationships between conditions affecting the nervous system and disorders in other systems are described. Thus under each symptom heading of which there are approximately 130, the possible differential diagnoses are listed. Part II deals with physical signs and describes methods of examination. It concludes with several pages devoted to outpatient and inpatient investigations. These are described in a brief and practical fashion and finally two pages are devoted to a short definition of the more sophisticated neurosurgical tests.

Volume II (or part III) of the work presents neurology in the more usual form with concise descriptions of diseases and affections of the central nervous system and muscles. This part is comprehensive and all possible neurological disorders including the rare seem to have been mentioned.

This neurology textbook has been written by a practising neurologist with the needs of the general practitioner in mind. The lay-out of the book is designed to follow the presentation of the disease by the patient to the clinician. Thus symptomatology is analysed first, followed by the signs; and those signs which are described at the beginning of Part II are therefore logically those concerned with departures from the normal appearance, the gait, and mental behaviour, as the patient first presents in the surgery.

Volume I being concerned with the differential diagnosis of symptoms and signs is difficult to read and is really meant as a reference book, the guiding signpost to the reading in Volume II of the diseases from which that particular patient may be suffering. Volume II is therefore the more readable book of the two and could be purchased alone.

If one had to make a criticism of this otherwise excellent textbook it would be that it is too detailed and comprehensive for the audience mentioned in

the foreword for whom he has written this book. This commendable fault has been due to the enthusiastic energy and the thoroughness with which the author has approached his task. Thus he has mentioned in his textbook many rare conditions which his audience will probably never see in the whole of their professional working lives.

The book is enhanced by a good contents list and a good index, and near the end by a most helpful list of selected references, and a fine collection of clinical and pathological photographs.

Should the young doctor be contemplating purchasing a textbook of neurology for his library shelf this new textbook of neurology is worthy of consideration alongside its competitors.

**The roots of individuality. Normal patterns of development in infancy.** SIBYLLE ESCALONA. London. Tavistock Publications. 1969. Pp. ix+546. Price £5.

In this book Dr Escalona describes the results of 20 years of research and observation in the field of human development. Up to now little was known of the finer aspects of development in relation to environment other than the relatively crude finding that gross deprivation usually had an adverse effect. Dr Escalona postulates a relationship between what she terms 'stable patterns of experience' and developmental status.

Intensive observation of 128 normal infants between the ages of 4-32 weeks form the clinical material on which she bases her theories, and 32 of these case histories are discussed in detail in the final 200 pages. This is probably the section of most interest to the general practitioner with its extensive descriptions of interaction between mother and child, which could well act as a stimulus to our own observations of mother-baby contacts.

The work as a whole, however, is heavy going for the reader without a specialized interest in psychiatry or infant development despite the obvious importance of the subject. The standard of production is good and there is an extensive list of references.

**Venereal diseases.** Second edition. AMBROSE KING, T.D., M.B., B.S., F.R.C.S. and CLAUDE NICOL, T.D., M.D., F.R.C.P. London. Bailliere, Tindall and Cassell. 1969. Pp. xiv+319. Price £3 15s. Od. (£3.75p).

Despite modern drugs venereal diseases manage to survive and although most general practitioners do not often see cases the possibility must never be forgotten. This standard textbook contains the necessary information in most readable form. The text is up to date and the index is adequate