

manner, although current interventive techniques such as induction, active management and fetal monitoring in labour are conventionally presented. The account of the repair of the episiotomy could have been enhanced by diagrams or illustrations. Emergencies in labour, and, in particular, complications of the third stage, are scarcely mentioned and pain relief in labour is not addressed at all.

Overall, the book is produced to the standard one has come to expect from its publishers, although some of the diagrams and bar charts look rather primitive. Each chapter carries a reference list and there is an adequate index.

M.J.V. BULL

General Practitioner, Oxford and Hospital Practitioner (Obstetrics), John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford

CASE PRESENTATIONS IN CLINICAL GERIATRIC MEDICINE

G.S. Rai, P.J. Murphy and G. Wright
Butterworths, Kent (1987)
136 pages. Price £7.95

This little book contains 60 case presentations with questions and detailed assessments and comments. It is crammed with facts about the medical care of the elderly and some of the information is useful, important and well-referenced. However, the text has been designed for those studying for the relevant diploma and membership examinations. As long as we rely on examinations, there will be a demand, perhaps even a justification, for books like this. Like all similar texts, it has a tendency to concentrate on disease processes and diagnosis with little of the wider personal and social context of ill health. No doubt those sitting higher examinations which cover geriatrics will find some useful facts and security in this book; those requiring a proper grounding in the subject will need to look elsewhere.

CHARLES B. FREER

Senior Lecturer in Primary Medical Care, University of Southampton

TEXTBOOK OF MEDICAL RECORD LINKAGE

J.A. Baldwin, E.D. Acheson and W.J. Graham (Eds)
Oxford University Press (1987)
347 pages. Price £37.50

It must be a mark of success that record linkage is now a reality to such an extent that it is taken for granted. This book is therefore an appropriate tribute to the late John Baldwin and other pioneers in this field whose basic technological achievements are described in the first section of the book.

Various contributors then present an inspiring wealth of examples of the epidemiological and management potential of record linkage. In the final section there is a valuable chapter by Professor Charles Florey on the ethical implications of record linkage and the topical aspects of confidentiality which control and limit the application of technology. These are of major concern to general practitioners and their patients, given the inevitable repercussions on the doctor-patient relationship of the growth in team access to patient information.

However, the general practitioner reader is left to work out for himself how record linkage techniques can be applied in primary care: for example, long-term follow up, shared care, preventive programmes and quality control. Many general practitioners now have appropriate data recording systems and the computer expertise to do this. For them, this would be an extremely useful book to find on the shelves in their postgraduate centres.

MURIEL BERKELEY

Teaching Fellow, Department of Community Medicine, Aberdeen University

A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO ASTHMA

R. Pauwels and P.D. Snashall
CBA Publishing Services, Dorking (1986)
167 pages.

This is a useful enough monograph on asthma, notwithstanding its authorship by two hospital specialists with its implicit claim that all asthmatics should be seen by specialists and thoroughly investigated — claims which would reduce the out-patient service to chaos if implemented.

There are simple and easy résumés on the pathophysiology of asthma for those who have long since forgotten such details, and the role of allergy and bronchial hyper-responsiveness is well explained. It is correctly emphasized that asthma is under-diagnosed, that the peak flow meter is as vital to the management of asthma as the sphygmomanometer is to hypertension, and that meters should be lent to patients as a diagnostic, educational and therapeutic exercise. Other respiratory function tests are less relevant to general practice and make tedious reading for the non-physiologist.

The book is sound on therapeutics and discusses each drug group succinctly, promotes the fearless use of short sharp courses of steroids, gives practical advice on the use of inhalers, spacers and extension tubes, and warns about the tragic consequences of over-reliance on nebulizers. The authors maintain that early and energetic treatment of even mild asthma can prevent the onset of irreversible airways obstruction.

The main weakness in this book is the authors' reluctance to involve the general practitioner in diagnosis and education, and his relegation to the role of merely monitoring asthma. They even claim that voluntary asthma societies have more of an educational and supportive role than the general practitioner. This is perhaps predictable in a work where several pages are devoted to the importance of IgE and prostaglandins in asthma, and where the first mention of advice to stop smoking is on page 159.

CHARLES DALY

General Practitioner, Co. Waterford, Republic of Ireland

UNDERSTANDING SENILE DEMENTIA

A.F. Jorm
Croom Helm, London (1987)
158 pages. Price £17.95 h/b, £8.95 p/b

The author of *Understanding senile dementia* tells us that it is aimed at practitioners and students in medicine and nursing, health administrators, social workers, medical psychologists, occupational therapists and lay people. Inevitably the author fails to satisfy the disparate needs of these groups.

The book cannot be recommended to doctors, although it might be useful to a medical student approaching the subject for the first time and looking for a relatively superficial introduction to dementia. An example of the book's lack of balance is the two and a half pages devoted to the link between Alzheimer's disease and Down's syndrome, while more important factors in the aetiology of dementia such as space-occupying lesions, uraemia and anoxia go unmentioned. Also, while old age is quoted as the most important risk factor in Alzheimer's disease, no mention is made of the increased risk for relatives if the disease has started before the age of 65 years. The redeeming features of the book are interesting chapters on the assessment and management of dementia and a good bibliography.

ALISTAIR TULLOCH

General Practitioner, Bicester, Oxfordshire