

the side to which babies are held by their mothers influences handedness later in life. As in most discussions of asymmetry, motor control and the co-ordination of action is least well covered here, reflecting the neuropsychologists' frequent neglect of this aspect of hemispheric function, which is a pity given that this area is one which has shown the greatest advance over the last fifteen years or so. In many instances the discussion is merely extended rather than developed by the latest literature, and only in a few are there any really new ideas such as Geschwind and Galaburda's theory of prenatal hormonal determination of handedness and accompanying side-effects, or the distinction between implicit and explicit memory. Where there are important new developments, these are often only tangentially related to hemispheric specialization, as for example in the recent debate on agnosia, or the nature of deep and surface dyslexia, where the question of which side of the brain is involved is only one possible basis of discussion of the problem and may be not the most fundamental.

The author's second intention, to provide a text at a somewhat lower level than before, is less well fulfilled. Most of the discussion assumes some knowledge of the subject and there is little description or illustration of basic ideas or phenomena. Thus the author refers to Sperry's "classic" split-brain work but does not describe it before embarking on a close and detailed discussion of callosotomy effects; and Broca's and Wernicke's aphasia are briefly summarised but only so that someone knowing them could follow what was meant. The book is not to be recommended for students below the third year, nor for anyone who does not know the basic paradigms and effects, but as an overview for more advanced students or workers in the area it is well worth reading—for the next year or two at least, maybe for up to six?

KA FLOWERS

Spinal Cord Compression, Contemporary Neurology Series By T N BYRNE AND S G WAXMAN. (Pp 278; Price £39.72.) Beckenham, Quest-Meriden Ltd, 1990. ISBN 0-8036-1465-9.

Any book outlining the diagnosis and management of spinal cord compression is most welcome. All too often disorders of the spinal cord have been regarded as an unexciting backwater of Neurology. Teaching is generally poor. The diagnostic prowess of our elders, so often ostentatiously vaunted with respect to the brain, tends to fall short of expectation when the disorder lies within the vertebral column. If medical audit—teaching by retrospective enquiry—is to prove its worth, it should attract a greater awareness of any short-fall in the practical management of neurospinal disorders including cord compression.

Not surprisingly, Drs Byrne and Waxman's book carries a message. It is somewhat different from the standard line of thought in Europe and in certain respects limited in its scope—but an important message nonetheless. They concentrate throughout on the clinical analysis of pain as the first evidence of spinal compression, pre-dating motor and other symptoms. They begin with some formidable statement that should alert the most complacent of resource managers:—

In the USA low back pain is second only to colds as the most common reasons for patients' visits to physicians. The number of individuals disabled by back pain grew at a rate of $14 \times$ that of the US population growth between 1971–1981.

The book is well written, the presentation and references excellent. European experience is quoted and earlier work not neglected. But the limitations of the study are immediately apparent. Neither author is a neurosurgeon. They do not set out to discuss traumatic spinal injury, congenital or developmental anomalies, and have reviewed only the principles of therapeutic management. Dr Waxman is Chairman of Neurology at Yale—New Haven and Dr Byrne co-director of the Neuro-Oncology unit. Therein lies their principal interest. Nearly one-third of patients dying with cancer have vertebral metastases, 5% develop epidural spinal cord compression and 90% of this latter group have pain localised to the spine or referred elsewhere as their presenting manifestation. The enshrined message for this group of patients is the need to inquire into any unexplained pain and if those pains cannot be ascribed to a viscus to look to the spine. Where doubt exists magnetic resonance imaging should be performed.

It is tempting to dub this book "cord compression in Miami widows" but this would be too dismissive. Not only do the authors make a valuable contribution to the subject of epidural metastases, but they have much to contribute to the wider concourse of spinal compression that could be read to advantage by even the most experienced Neurosurgeon. Neoplasia whether epidural, intradural-extramedullary, intramedullary or leptomeningeal is fully and informatively examined. One can search many books in vain for percentage figures of different types of tumours and this is no exception. Tumours in children receive scant mention. There are comprehensive chapters on anatomy and the pathophysiology of signs and symptoms, covering such details as the innervation of vertebrae, conus and epiconus syndromes, the occurrence of papilloedema with spinal neoplasms, and the pyriformis syndrome which commonly masquerades as sciatica. The chapter on pain is given as the key to diagnosis with the differential diagnosis covered in chapters on non-neoplastic causes of compression and non-compressive myelitis. The foundation of these chapters seems to be an extensive literature search but I have reservations concerning the adequacy with which such topics as spondylosis, disc disease or Chiari malformations are discussed except in the context of providing a differential diagnosis.

EMR CRITCHLEY

Neuropathology of AIDS By H V VINTERS AND K H ANDERS. (Pp 229; Price US\$129.95.) London, Wolfe Publishing, 1990. ISBN 0-8493-5074-3.

A gap of two years since the last book on the neuropathology of AIDS may seem rather short; yet the rapid progress of our knowledge makes this new publication most appropriate. This is a totally new book which comes from Los Angeles, Drs Vinters and Anders coming from a laboratory which has accumulated a wide experience over the years since this syndrome first appeared.

The book is divided into thirteen chapters which, except for that dealing with the virological aspects by O'Brien, Koyanagi and Chen, are all by Vinters and Anders themselves. The descriptive neuropathology is given the lion's share. Chapter 1 is devoted to the appearances of HIV encephalopathy and its clinical counterpart; we see the various appearances of multinucleated giant cells, the hallmark of the disorder, in their diverse arrangements and distribution. This is followed by the description of the numerous opportunistic infections, viral, fungal, bacterial, and parasitic, the tumours and the vascular complications. Other chapters describe the abnormalities of the white matter, in which the controversial topic of vacuolar myelopathy is given surprisingly little space. The pathology of peripheral nerve and muscle is dealt with in chapter 9, while chapter 10 is devoted to 'miscellaneous findings' which also includes lesions of the pituitary and the eye, while chapter 11 is devoted to paediatric AIDS. Other, non-neuropathological topics are also included though, as expected, they do not contribute greatly: one of these is 'virologic aspects of AIDS and the nervous system'. Put, as it is, at the end of the book, I fear this chapter will perhaps not get the attention it deserves and would have been more appropriate as the opening chapter. Editorial mysteries!

As it is organized, the book is not exempt from some minor repetitions: CMV infection is described under 'Opportunistic infections' and then mentioned with 'Leukoencephalopathy' and again in chapter 9 among the abnormalities of the nerve. These repetitions are, in a sense, unavoidable, even in books written by a single (or few) authors and indeed do not detract from the overall attractions of this publication. Among these I would mention an enjoyable text, a considerable amount of information, some interesting and stimulating pieces of information (the exhaustive description of lymphomatoid granulomatosis, the still little known subject of the 'focal pontine leukoencephalopathy'), and the extensive bibliography. Plenty of pictures too, although many of them, regrettably, are not up to the standard of the text.

In conclusion, a book that, while describing the personal experience of a laboratory in the forefront of the investigations on the neuropathology of AIDS, does not ignore the contribution of other groups equally involved in this topic: a book to recommend to people working in the field. Its price is, unfortunately, what one expects these days; however British readers might take some comfort from the current favourable rate of exchange.

F SCARAVILLI

Medical Ethics in Practice By T R BARD. (Pp 124; Price £28.00.) London, Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1990. ISBN 1-56032-056-7.

This short book of about 120 pages describes a worthy initiative from the Beth Israel Hospital, the staff of which considered how best to look at difficult ethical decisions. After some discussion, three principal themes emerged—that all decision-making must be kept at the bedside, that any ethical programme should not have the status of a formal hospital standing committee with its normal bureaucratic structure, and that any group of people helping the hospital staff make ethical decisions would not be acting on