

Book Reviews

Maternal-fetal Endocrinology (Eds.) D. Tulchinsky and K. J. Ryan. 418 pp. Philadelphia, London and Toronto: W. B. Saunders Company (1980). £22. ISBN 0-7216-8911-6.

Time was when a man with a message wrote a book. Now they are all reports of conferences or written by committees. This one is in the latter category but does not suffer from the shapelessness of a committee creation for Ken Ryan's writ runs large throughout.

The book is in five parts, the first of which properly consists of a section on the placenta comprising two chapters, one on steroids and one on protein hormones. Then follow seven chapters on the maternal endocrine system, the last of which is a kind of pot-pourri on the postpartum period which manages the astonishing feat of 191 references for 26 pages of text. Fortunately the reference system is superscript numbers which do not break up the text, which would otherwise be unreadable. There are six chapters on the fetal endocrine system and two rather contrived parts, on the fetal-maternal interaction and the adaptation of the newborn to extrauterine life, which might well have been distributed among the preceding sections.

For the most part it is a Harvard benefit, 10 of the 24 listed authors hailing from Boston. This is no bad thing; the Ivy League still carries a brand of excellence and the geographical base made it possible for Tulchinsky and Ryan to put cohesion into the book. No matter how long and scholarly a book is, reviewers are always going to find something missing. For me it was that there is nothing on early stages of pregnancy, particularly the exchange of signals between mother and fertilized ovum which controls implantation.

It may be invidious to select one chapter for particular praise but as it is impossible to mention all 20 specifically it is fair to take the chapter on the maintenance of pregnancy and the initiation of labour by Ken Ryan himself as reflecting the style and content of the book. It consists of a great many separate bits, not all clearly related. The discontinuity is emphasized by a multiplicity of subheads and the double-column format, all of which make it look like an undergraduate examination text. It is anything but that. Although clearly and simply written, it is scholarly, critical and deeply researched.

This is one of the most important books in the obstetric field in recent times. It will set the pace for some time to come.

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Pregnancy Hypertension (Ed.) J. Bonnar, I. MacGillivray and E. M. Symonds. 597 pp. Lancaster: MTP Press Limited (1980). £20.00. ISBN 0-85200-269-6.

Pregnancy-induced hypertension is a fascinating and enigmatic subject which resembles a jigsaw puzzle that we are unable to assemble. Is this because we do not know how to fit the pieces together or are some of the pieces missing? I suspect the latter, but the currently available pieces are all clearly and well displayed in this volume which records the papers given at the First Congress of the International Society for the Study of Hypertension in Pregnancy which met at Dublin in September 1978. The book opens with a scholarly review by Leon Chesley of the historical evolution of concepts of hypertensive disease in pregnancy, the remainder of the volume being divided into eight sections which deal respectively with