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Book Review

Principles and Practice of Geriatric Medicine edited by M. S. J. Pathy. John Wiley and Sons, Chichester, 1985. 1336 pages. Price £62.50.

It has taken me some six months to review this massive book, reinforcing my admiration of the labour which must have been involved in its generation. There are now two major British reference books on geriatric medicine, this one and Brocklehurst's *Textbook of Geriatrics and Gerontology*. Both are too heavy to carry around or for bedtime reading, so I have dipped into Brocklehurst at work and Pathy at home during the autumn, looking up clinical problems I have encountered and topics I have had to teach. 'Big Brocklehurst', now in its third edition, is already established as a source. Although a handful of its authors are also contributors to the new Pathy tome, I found enough difference between the two books to be glad to have both.

Pathy (and his 72 contributors) start with introductory chapters on the basic sociology, biology and psychology of ageing, but the major part of the book is devoted to the practical consideration of clinical problems as they affect the elderly. This is apparent in the emphasis given to neurological disorders (almost 300 pages) compared to, for example, the respiratory system (30 pages) or gastrointestinal disease (100 pages). The selection of subjects and their respective allocation of space reflects the problems posed by the elderly sick, particularly where their presentation may differ from that seen in younger patients. As is customary in such large textbooks, the

arrangement of chapters is based on bodily systems, with additional material on specific topics such as exercise, pharmacology, sleep disorders, anaesthesia and surgery in the elderly. While this traditional approach is probably the most reasonable structure for a reference book, some shorter introductory texts on geriatric medicine have successfully adopted a more integrated, problem-orientated format. Although many of the chapters in Pathy are eminently readable at a sitting, the book as a whole would be difficult to plough through from beginning to end.

Towards the end of the book there are chapters on health care delivery in the UK, Japan and the USA. These contributions are of broad interest, and since 20 of the authors come from outside the British Isles the book should appeal to readers in other countries. It is refreshing to see a chapter on health problems of older people in the developing world: this is where some two-thirds of the world's population over 65 years of age will live as we go into the next century. We can only hope that Bob Geldof will not retire too early.

With over 60 chapters to choose from, it is customary for the reviewer to comment on variable standards, but I will refrain from poaching the curate's egg on this occasion. However, it is fair to say that this book is primarily aimed at clinicians, with enough gerontology included to set the stage for geriatric medicine. The editing and layout are excellent, the index good, and most chapters have a useful selection of references. I hope that Pathy will join Brocklehurst as a standard source in hospital libraries and departments of geriatric medicine.

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