Book Review

Women and Epilepsy, edited by M.R. Trimble, 1991. Wiley.

Despite Dr Trimble's disclaimer in the preface, it is difficult to conclude other than that this is a book on epilepsy that is the result of a symposium. The contributions are a mixture of reviews of the literature, personal opinions and presentations of the authors' own work. Some chapters are highly relevant to the topic of women and epilepsy but in others the connection is rather tenuous.

There is a useful insight into the life of a woman with epilepsy by Mrs Sue Usiskin followed by an account from Dr Trimble's own group on measurement of quality of life in patients with epilepsy using repertory grid techniques and then an account of psychosocial rehabilitation techniques used in the Netherlands. There is a brief review of the epidemiology of epilepsy, highlighting the differences between the genders, and an interesting review by Taylor on the effects of gender on development and behaviour including the effect on susceptibility to febrile convulsions at different ages. There are good accounts of childhood and adolescent epilepsies with reference to relevant gender differences and a review of the treatment and overall management of epilepsy in adolescent girls with seizures disorders. There is an adequate discussion of the effects of antiepileptic drugs on the pharmacokinetics of the oral contraceptive pill and on endogenous sex hormones and sex hormone binding globulin and the effects of both endogenous and administered hormones on seiz-

ure threshold. The discussion on pregnancy in women with epilepsy and the teratogenic potential of antiepileptic drugs is discussed clearly. It should be noted, however, that since the conference the maternal use of carbamazepine in the first trimester has been associated with a 1% risk of spina bifida, a risk that is similar to that which has been associated with sodium valproate.

Subsequent chapters conclude that gender is not a major factor in the cognitive function of patients with epilepsy and that depression is more common in females than males. There is an informative and well written chapter by Betts on the basis, classification, investigation and treatment of non-epileptic attack disorders although not everyone would agree that the onset of organic epileptic seizures may be precipitated by emotional stress such as sexual abuse and that ictal symptoms, such as thigh brushing automatisms may mimic the abuse. I suspect that the author has strayed from fact to opinion in this contention. Otherwise, I found this chapter the best in the book.

In conclusion, this book will form a useful reference for information on the particular aspects of managing epilepsy in women and Dr Trimble has performed a useful service in bringing these aspects together in a single volume.

John Duncan