Book review

Normal and Pathologic Development of the Human Brain and Spinal Cord, by M. Dąmbska and K.E. Wiśniewski, John Libbey & Company Ltd, London, 1999. ISBN 0 86196 591 4 (paperback), pp 212, £45.00.

This book is based largely on the personal experience of Maria Dąmbska, a Urologist and Developmental Neuropathologist, and Krystyna Wiśniewski, a Paediatric Neurologist and Neuropathologist. It is divided into two halves, the first dealing with normal development; and the second with abnormal development. Each half is followed by a list of references relevant to that part. Both parts have been written by both authors and this results in a constant style. The account of normal development clarifies the mechanisms by which many of the syndromes that result from abnormalities at various stages of development arise. The book is addressed to two groups of readers, neuropathologists and general pathologists, and paediatric neurologists, but it will be useful to many research workers in this field.

The account of the etiological factors involved in abnormal CNS development is too short, covering only four pages. This summary includes the role of both genetic and exogenous factors, which clearly play important roles in many of the problems referred to in the text. The book would benefit by including a more extensive account, including explanatory diagrams, of

basic genetics and the mechanisms by which these and environmental agents affect cell and tissue function and development.

The list of references covers most of the important advances in this field. There are numerous illustrations but some of these could be improved both in quality and with greater use of identification marks (e.g. arrows) on the figures to clarify points referred to in the text; for example, arrows pointing to the microglial cells in Fig. 13 would assist identification. Some of the captions are too short; those relating to the ultrastructural, and some other photographs should include a summary of the main features shown. A few of the identification marks used, such as in Fig. 35, are difficult to identify.

Some of the descriptions of the syndromes referred to would benefit by expansion, such as those of tuberous sclerosis and neurofibromatosis.

Professors Dąmbska and Wiśniewski have produced a very useful book that will appeal to a wide variety of pathologists and neurobiologists. It is easy to read and provides a clear account of the mechanisms involved in the production of many abnormalities encountered in paediatric practice. I will certainly use it and strongly recommend it. I hope that the authors will develop it further for a second edition.

W.R. Timperley