tage in a book of this size is the lack of references, but a useful bibliography is provided. So long as these additional sources are consulted, then I can recommend this book as a compact handbook for doctors and medical students. In any case I can thoroughly recommend it for health visitors, occupational and physiotherapists, family care officers of the Muscular Dystrophy Group, and others who are involved in managing patients with neuromuscular diseases at home.

SARAH BUNDEY

In Vitro Fertilisation: Past, Present and Future

By S Fishel and E M Symonds. (Pp 276; £27.50 hardback, £17.50 softback.) Oxford: IRL Press. 1986.

Human in vitro fertilisation is a subject which impinges on many aspects of society. As an applied clinical scientific speciality it has provided a solution to the problems of infertility for a large and increasing number of couples, but its practice and potential research applications have made it a procedure which generates more controversial ethical and legal dilemmas than most. This book presents a concise and comprehensive review of the clinical, scientific, moral, and legal aspects of the subject, each chapter being written by a different specialist from his or her viewpoint.

The book opens with a chapter on the historical background of IVF, from the discoveries of the early embryologists, through the developments of tissue culture techniques, to the introduction of modern methods of endocrinology and laparoscopy as prerequisites of current IVF practice. The second chapter considers 'The infertile couple', identifying the criteria used for selecting those for whom IVF is an appropriate therapy, emphasising that the procedure is used as a 'last resort'. There then follow eight chapters devoted, in varying degrees of detail, to the clinical, scientific, and technical procedures used in IVF, including the hormonal assessment and control of ovulation, laparoscopic and ultrasound techniques for oocyte recovery, laboratory methods for semen preparation, in vitro fertilisation and culture of pre-embryos, and, finally, the embryo transfer

procedure. All of these chapters are well written and informative, particularly those on 'Preparation for human in vitro fertilisation in the laboratory' (S Fishel and P Jackson) and 'Andrology and semen preparation for IVF' (R J Aitken) which provide both comprehensive reviews and helpful technical detail.

Subsequent chapters, dealing with the success rate of IVF, variations in IVF programmes, and the nursing care and counselling of IVF patients, complete the clinical and scientific section of the book.

The remaining half dozen chapters, amounting to about one-third of the book, are largely devoted to the ethical, legal, sociological, and political issues which surround the IVF procedure and its related applications. Collectively, these chapters comprise a debate on well recognised controversial issues, such as the moral status of an embryo, argued from the balanced viewpoint of an academic theologian, and the legal rights of an embryo, as interpreted by a Queen's Counsel. The section includes a forthright commentary by a Member of Parliament (Lee Abse) on the political difficulties of implementing the type of recommendations made in the Warnock report; this chapter is very much a politician's personal view of events but provides interesting reading and makes understandable the apparent reluctance of the Government to get to grips with the problems of introducing legislation on this contentious subject.

The penultimate chapter speculates on future developments of IVF and its potential research applications, some of which may prove more difficult in practice than is sometimes implied. These would have seemed appropriately exciting subjects on which to end the book, and in keeping with its subtitle 'Past, Present and Future'. The final chapter, however, is a rather unexciting account of a computer system designed for use in an IVF centre, which might have been better placed at the end of the clinical and scientific chapters.

In summary, the book is extremely good and can be recommended to a wide readership. It provides a useful comprehensive review of the 'state of the art' for those involved professionally or at the fringes of this developing sub-speciality, and is sufficiently well written and readable to be appreciated by those with a passing philosophical interest in the subject.

ALAN McDERMOTT