certainly succeeds in clarifying the muddled waters of one of the more heterogeneous groups of genetic skin diseases, but does not remove all the confusion. Ichthyosis is defined as a disorder of keratinisation, yet recent advances in the biochemistry and molecular biology of keratinisation have produced little evidence pointing to fundamental abnormalities of keratin synthesis or organisation in many of these diseases.

The tendency to revert to acronyms or abbreviations such as BIDS, IBIDS, KID, HID, and ILC is an irritating distraction, but I suppose a constant repetition of the names in full might be even more tedious!

This book will be a useful reference source for clinical geneticists, dermatologists, and paediatricians. Its price may dissuade many from buying a personal copy, but there is nothing else on the market which matches it.

R A J EADY

Maternal-Fetal Toxicology. A Clinicians' Guide. Ed Gideon Koren. (Pp 456; \$125.00.) New York: Marcel Dekker. 1990.

Clinical geneticists frequently receive enquiries from colleagues, particularly in obstetrics, about the possible teratogenic risk to the unborn child of chemical and physical agents in a pregnancy. The editor and a number of the contributors to this multiauthor text have established centres with a multidiscipline team for enquiries of

this nature, many of which come directly from the couples/women concerned. This text is said to be a result of the new approaches and clinical tools which developed.

The book is divided into four main sections covering Drugs in pregnancy, Poisoning and radiation in pregnancy, Genetic and obstetric considerations, and the Organization and operation of teratogen information services.

Particularly well written and succinct are the chapters on Ionizing and nonionizing (sic) radiation in pregnancy and Genetic aspects, which covers clinical genetics and genetic counselling.

One of the interesting aspects of the text is the chapter on Nonmedical drug and chemical use in pregnancy. The inclusion of this as a separate topic reflects the frequency of enquiries of this nature by the clientele. The rarity of such enquiries from personal experience in the United Kingdom probably reflects a difference in attitude rather than the magnitude of the problem.

One chapter, Teratology information sources, reviews in some detail other textbooks on reference sources including computer databases, an unusual practice for a textbook.

One of the important points mentioned in the introduction of many of the chapters, but explored in detail in the chapter The way women perceive teratogenic risk, is the fact that many women overestimate the degree of risk with the majority of teratogenic exposures in utero.

There are, I am afraid, a few criti-

cisms. Having read the text through rather than 'dipping into it' at random, there is repetition of material, both in the introductions of the various chapters, as well as in the topics covered in the individual chapters, something that editors of multiauthor texts should be wary of.

The index does not cross reference items and topics in enough detail. For example, if one wanted to look up epilepsy and anticonvulsants, these are covered in numerous sections of the book, but one is required to look up the individual anticonvulsants one by one to find the relevant material. The use of a hierarchical index with highlighting in the main section would have been helpful.

The text also suffers from being parochially North American in its terminology and listing of centres with experience and interest in this topic. In addition, while the reader can usually get the sense of what the authors are attempting to convey, on many occasions this requires the ability to understand what might be politely called 'neologisms' or more correctly 'North Americanisms'.

While this book might well appeal to obstetricians, paediatricians, and clinical geneticists who deal with enquiries of this nature, I am afraid the drawbacks outlined, when the cost is taken into account, might not make it a first choice for the reference bookshelf. For that price, I would expect the last word!

R F MUELLER

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