Book reviews


In this well-written and readable book Dr Brooke has achieved a comprehensive clinical review of the whole spectrum of neuromuscular disorders. The tone and pace of the book are well set by the epithet to the first chapter on symptoms and signs—“Please listen to the patient, he’s trying to tell you what disease he has,” and by the opening sentence—“It often seems that the urgency with which physicians rush their patients off for laboratory studies has its historical equal only in the migration of lemmings. . . .” Individual chapters are devoted to systematic descriptions of disorders of the motor neurone, peripheral neuropathies, diseases of the neuromuscular junction, muscular dystrophies, myotonia, inflammatory myopathies, metabolic muscle diseases, abnormal muscle activity, and ending with “congenital (more or less)” muscle diseases.

The descriptions are concise but comprehensive and interspersed with clinical photographs and an occasional biopsy photomicrograph. The bibliography is intentionally selective and often recent rather than historical or original. This is a highly individual work which should find appeal with a wide audience of clinicians at all levels.

VICTOR DUBOWITZ


Not surprisingly, a book with this title has been padded out with material which is not strictly “treatment.” Indeed more than half of the chapters are on pathology, “research trends,” metabolic, genetic, and EMG studies. Nevertheless, it is gratifying that there should be so much useful therapeutic information to report on a group of diseases still widely believed outside the cognoscenti to be untreatable. The introductory chapter by one of the editors is a succinct account of the scope of treatment. The review of treatment for dermatomyositis and polymyositis is well balanced and justifiably reserved on the relative merits of immunosuppressive drugs and steroids. Professor Rowland and his colleagues consider that dermatomyositis and polymyositis should be regarded separately in clinical trials as their experience indicates significant differences. They advise initial use of prednisone but when “steroid resistance” occurs, immunosuppressive treatment is justified when the disease is incapacitating or life-threatening. The treatment of myasthenia gravis is largely confined to the use of steroids, with some conventional remarks on thymectomy. Plasmapheresis is not mentioned. There is an interesting chapter on disorders of glycogen and lipid metabolism with some preliminary observations on treatment, and the account of myotonic disorders and periodic paralyses is a useful summary.

The chapter on neuropathies properly concentrates on “treatable” types and is suitably reserved with regard to the role of corticosteroids. The chapter on amyotrophic lateral sclerosis is well balanced and gives a good account of ameliorative measures which are commonly neglected. There are rewarding sections on orthopaedic measures and on cardiorespiratory problems. Despite some flat spots (including an impossible diagram of the stretch reflex) the book is a worthwhile compendium.

J. A. SIMPSON


This book is a collection of papers presented at a Symposium at the Mario Negri Institute in Milan. In such publications the editors ask speakers to cover agreed topics but have little influence on the content. The resultant quality of such compilations is frequently very heterogeneous and this book is no exception.

The general subject covered here is complex and important: now that many neuronal pathways have been mapped and their neurotransmitters tentatively identified, some understanding of their interactions is vital to the neuroscientist. This is particularly so in view of the cascade of events (behavioural and biochemical) likely to result from