
This book gives a short account of the structure and function of the nervous system and in the preface the authors indicate that it is aimed at the "beginning student" wanting a brief overview of neuroanatomy and neurophysiology or the advanced student wishing to review the topic. The fact that it has gone to seven editions suggests that it fulfills these aims and has found an appropriate audience, and in my assessment of it I have particularly born in mind its potential audience. Two summers ago I spent a few months looking in detail at all the neuroanatomy and neurophysiology books available in an attempt to find a suitable text book that we could recommend to our undergraduate students. There are many such books, some large and some small, and I concluded then that an earlier edition of this book did not fulfill our needs. How then does the current edition rate and for whom is it suitable?

It begins with a traditional review of the anatomy and physiology of neurons and then follows with separate chapters on all the main components of the nervous system. Some of these, such as the section on the brain stem and cranial nerves, are very detailed and this seems to be the rule in many similar books. How many of us, as undergraduates, remember the chore of trying to learn brain stem sections yet none, I suspect, still remember the details. What we all needed as students, and indeed need now, is the equivalent of an idiot's guide to the brain stem rather than a detailed description as given here. On the other hand other sections of this book are rather brief. In common with many of its competitors this book has only a short section on the cerebral cortex and the description of the control of speech and language can only be described as sketchy. Other topics such as the reticular formation and the control of consciousness, and the control of eye movements, are similarly covered only very briefly. I could find virtually nothing on the important topic of the metabolism of neurons which is a serious omission though one shared by many similar books.

The best chapter is called chemical neuroanatomy and covers a topic often poorly dealt with in other text books. In it are described the main neurotransmitters, their major localisation in the nervous system, and a description of their physiological significance. This is an excellent review of a difficult topic and could be read with interest by both undergraduate and postgraduate. The illustrations are particularly good. Unfortunately, the following chapter on cerebrospinal fluid is less good and this could have been considerably improved by the inclusion of more line diagrams to illustrate, for example, the different types of hydrocephalus. The final chapter is on "neurologic diagnostic tests" and provides a review of the laboratory tests available for the investigation of the nervous system. In a book concerning the essentials of clinical neuroanatomy and neurophysiology this seemed to me to be totally unnecessary.

Overall the book is nicely presented, the line diagrams are clear, and it is easy to handle and of good quality paper. Whilst the contents list is detailed the index is very poor; obvious omissions are coma, memory, and cerebral dominance. In common with many small books attempting to summarise neuroanatomy and neuro-physiology this book has an uneven content and insufficient detail on some topics to make it suitable for recommendation to undergraduates as a primary text, and to be fair the authors do not claim this. I think it would be a useful book for a physician to have as a review of the nervous system and it certainly could be read with benefit by postgraduate students working for the membership of either the College of Physicians or College of Psychiatrists.

NEF CARTLIDGE


There are those who argue that the art of psychiatry, the mesh and web of clinical practice, cannot be taught but can only be learned, osmotically as it were, through repeated exposure to as wide a variety of clinical situations and challenges as possible. There are others who, despairing of the soft, intuitive, inconsistent quality of much psychiatric practice, insist that the whole process of diagnosis should be handed over to appropriately programmed computers. The authors of this substantial text are well aware of this dilemma and indeed their justification for publishing their book (and these days massive tomes certainly demand justification) is that it will actually help students and practitioners to think. It starts with a somewhat abbreviated survey of biological and social functioning, proceeds with a review of the strategy and the tactics underpinning clinical reasoning, summarises the knowledge and the procedures required in routine clinical practice, describes how the general principles outlined can be applied to different clinical settings and con-
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