Book reviews


This book records the papers and verbatim discussions of a round table conference held at Smolenice in October 1960 under the chairmanship of Professor H. Jasper of Montreal. Most of the participants came from eastern Europe, and of the eight papers recorded only two, one by Professor Jasper who also summarized the discussions, and one by Dr. R. Vizioli of Rome, came from the west. The papers generally have an electroencephalographic flavour rather than a neurosurgical, and two can be singled out for special commendation. The first of these is Dr. Jasper's which outlines new concepts of focal epilepsy, including that of a hierarchy of foci, in which there may be a group of neurones with the lowest threshold for epileptogenic brain tissue. There is some evidence of mutual facilitation between various parts of this larger mass. The second is by Dr. Z. Servit of Prague on the prophylactic effect of anticonvulsant therapy in rats with alumina cream lesions in the motor and acoustic areas. His work is well controlled, and he shows clearly that the administration of phenylethylbarbituric acid (Dormirial) for a few weeks after the production of a lesion not only greatly decreases the likelihood of epilepsy even after drug therapy is later stopped but also reduces the severity of the seizures. The book stresses that surgical therapy is only indicated in a minority of epileptic patients, and brings together much information which is not currently available in the Anglo-American literature.


The emotional impact of epilepsy both on patients and their relations and friends is large. It is always part of the physician's duty to alleviate this as much as possible by explaining what epilepsy is, by giving as reassuring a prognosis as possible, and by foreseeing and as far as possible forestalling the consequences that the condition may entail in educational, social, and economic life. Some explanation of the principles of treatment and the likely side-effects of some regimes is also usually desirable. The question of inheritance, marriage, and choice of a career may have to be discussed. Intelligence and the possibility of mental deterioration may be asked about, especially by parents. These and similar questions are dealt with clearly and sympathetically in this volume. It will be of special value to the general practitioner who has epileptic patients but the general physician and paediatrician will also find it useful. It is written in such terms that it can safely be recommended to intelligent epileptic patients and their relatives. Although published in America the only sections which are not applicable to conditions in this country are the chapter on service for the epileptic and some parts of the discussion on social-economic aspects. In general the book is in harmony with the increasing tendency for patients to take an intelligent and informed interest in their own diseases. The price is unfortunately high in Britain.


The authors are to be congratulated on having produced an admirable monograph reporting in detail a series of 241 of these neoplasms, which are rare indeed in the series of brain tumours seen by an individual neurosurgeon. Attention is drawn to the very wide spread of age incidence, to the varying degrees of malignancy within a given type, to treatment and prognosis. It is concluded that the results of modern treatment, combining extensive excision of the tumour with subsequent radiotherapy, are better than is the case with other malignant forms of intracranial tumour. As is usual with any group of malignant neoplasms in the central nervous system the occasional patient with a long survival period is noted. The suggestion is made that new lines of study by tissue culture and electron microscopy might lead to more exact prognosis in a given case.

The book is admirably produced with illustrations and photomicrographs of the highest quality.

WYLIE MCKISSOCK


This volume is a record of the ninth annual meeting of the Houston Neurological Society held in 1961. It contains 18 chapters by various participants, all of whom have contributed very readable papers. The book is arranged in four sections, and the first of these deals with epidemiological and genetic considerations of various brain tumours. An interesting chapter by Dr. Leonard P. Kurland discusses the widely varying discrepancies in natural mortality rates between the North American and western European countries and countries like Japan, and concludes that different criteria must be employed in compiling the statistics. Dr. Zimmerman introduces a very interesting chapter on experimental brain tumours. The second section on pathology and pathological classifications contains two important chapters by Professor Zülch of Cologne, as well as supporting chapters by American authors. The historical development of present-day ideas is stressed. The third section on diagnostic methods includes chapters on electroencephalography, angiography, and pneumography, but covers little fresh ground. Isotope scanning techniques are not mentioned.
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Wylie Mckissock

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