
What is regarded as increasing enlightenment, or perhaps an increased journalistic interest in medical matters, has lead to much more "self-diagnosis" in the Neurology Clinic. One of the more popular diagnostic labels attached to the patient by himself or his informed friends, is myalgic encephalomyelitis or ME. Many patients attending the clinic, convinced of the correctness of the diagnosis will bring evidence of confirmation from specialist practitioners and organised groups and will not be persuaded otherwise. They will not accept that there is an alternative explanation for their problems to "post-viral fatigue" or whatever. These patients pose a considerable problem. It is not surprising that an attempt has been made to rationalise this "syndrome" to give it an identity as a nosological entity, consider the pathogenesis, importance, and implications and to define the diagnostic criteria.

This book is edited by a principal medical officer at the department of health, a psychiatrist by training and a professor of immunopathology. They have invited contributors from diverse backgrounds to discuss their involvement in ME and to resolve the "particularly challenging problem for contemporary medicine...those puzzling clinical entities which are defined purely in terms of symptoms, which are accompanied by little in the way of consistent physical signs, which affect quite large numbers of patients for which no specific treatment appears effective". Thirty-five contributors address the problem in a book of 275 pages. It is stated unequivocally on page 167..."it is however beyond any doubt that muscles are involved in this syndrome with both metabolic and ultrastructural abnormalities...and yet on page 237 the more orthodox neurological view is expressed..."our management of patients...is based on our belief that the condition forms part of the spectrum of a depressive illness, triggered by a viral infection". The psychologist, recognising that it has "attracted much controversy" concludes that it is not clear whether we are dealing with a single syndrome or a group of disorders which share some common characteristics.

BOOK REVIEWS
MATTERS ARISING: Wessely replies:

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