MATTERS ARISING

Impaired procedural learning after damage to the left supplementary motor area

Ackermann et al. have recently reported on procedural learning in a patient with a lesion of the left mesial frontal cortex. The patient had no deficit when tracking a visual target by his right hand. However, the patient's performance was severely impaired in a mirrored tracking task. It was concluded that the finding confirms "previous PET results (the reader is referred to studies by Seitz et al. and Grafton et al.) indicating the supplementary motor area to be a part of circuits mediating visuomotor skill acquisition."1

In the study of Seitz et al. subjects were taught a sequence of finger to digit oppositions before PET. PET was performed during initial learning of the sequence, advanced learning, and during skilled performance. They found activation of the supplementary motor area during initial learning as well as during skilled performance and for a specific movement of the supplementary motor area in motor learning. Grafton et al. employed a pursuit rotor task. Activation in the posterior part of the supplementary motor area was found to increase with the level of skilled performance. There was no indication of a role of the supplementary motor area in motor learning. Furthermore, the task of Grafton et al. corresponded to the control task of Ackermann et al., in which the patient's performance was not impaired. The notion that these two PET studies indicate "the supplementary motor area to be part of circuits mediating visuomotor skill acquisition" (Ackermann et al.) seems not to be clear.

There are studies on visuomotor learning to which Ackermann et al. do not refer. Lang et al.1 have studied brain potentials when subjects learned to track a visual target in a mirror reversed way. Brain potentials were more negative in frontalateral and frontomedial recordings with the learning task than with a control task (non-inverse visual tracking). The functional relevance of this finding was shown by demonstrating intersubject correlations between additional frontal negativity and the success of motor learning. This result was confirmed in subsequent studies.1 The later study1 employed two independent techniques of functional brain imaging, brain potentials and regional cerebral blood flow (rCBF) measurements by SPECT. With motor learning (compared with the control task) there was a significant increase of rCBF in the frontal lateral cortex, the middle frontal gyrus (of either hemisphere), basal ganglia, and cerebellum. More recently, Kornhuber et al.1,2 have studied visuomotor learning in 53 patients with chronic frontal lobe lesions. These patients performed a mirror reversed tracking task with non-inverted tracking as a control. Out of 53 patients 16 showed impaired motor learning. The critical correlation between the supplementary motor area and the anterior portion of the cingulate gyrus of both hemispheres.

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Ackermann et al reply:
With regard to the comments by Lang and Kornhuber on our paper:1 (1) Both PET studies referred to in our paper report activation of the supplementary motor area during acquisition of a new motor task (early motor learning). The fact that there was also supplementary motor area activation during "skilled performance" does not argue against a role for the supplementary motor area in motor learning. Even if the new movement sequence could be executed reasonably well at the end of the testing session, there may still be room for further improvement and therefore for further learning while subjects execute the task. For example, in motor conditioning subjects may reach an asymptote during a one hour learning session, but still show further learning in subsequent training sessions after intervals of hours or days. (2) We are well aware that motor learning has been studied extensively using both psychophysiological and PET technology, and we agree that the papers by Lang and Kornhuber are important in this regard. However, an exhaustive review of this literature is clearly beyond the scope of a short report, and the results of these representative studies based on the latest technology—that is, PET.

The pathway possibly responsible for the occurrence of isolated lateropulsion of the trunk

Bertholon et al. recently described a patient with a lesion in the medial part of the cerebellar peduncle presenting with isolated lateropulsion to the side of the lesion.1 I had previously reported a case with a similar clinical picture and reviewed the medical literature.2 The lesion in my patient involved the white matter in the inferior portion of the ipsilateral cerebellar hemisphere, possibly in the territory of the lateral branch of the posterior inferior cerebellar artery (PICA). Spinocerebellar, cuneocerebellar, reticulocerebellar, and olivocerebellar fibres run in the inferior cerebellar peduncle. The topographical location of the specific involvement of the cerebellar system within the inferior cerebellar peduncle has not been fully clarified.3 I assume that the fibres in the lesions of both the patient of Bertholon et al. and my patient may be the motor fibres from the somatosensory cortex, the frontal eye fields, the supplementary motor area, and the cerebellar cortex.4,5 The lesion in my patient was located in the paravermian region of the inferior cerebellar hemisphere.

Lesions involving other parts of the cerebellum or brainstem may produce signs of lateropulsion; however, they are usually associated with additional neurological deficits. Amarenco et al. reported several patients with lesions in the medial branch of the PICA (mPICA); most of the patients with lateropulsion were associated with vertigo.6 However, in their patients, lateropulsion of the trunk persisted longer than other signs and eventually became "isolated". Together with the findings in my patient, this suggests that fibres mediating balance may pass through the territory of the mPICA and reach the territory of the IPICA. Separation between the fibres mediating balance and the more medially placed fibres mediating vestibular function should occur so that an "isolated" neurological deficit becomes possible. Indeed, in the cat, primary vestibular fibres end mainly in the flocculus and nodulus, whereas fibres in the dorsal spinocerebellar tract end more laterally, in the intermediate zone.6 The assumption that selective lesion of the dorsal spinocerebellar tract produces signs of "isolated lateropulsion of the trunk" in humans awaits proof.

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3 Iwata M, Hirano A. Localization of olivo-
BOOK REVIEWS

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This multi-author book is divided into eight sections. The basic principles of ultrasound are covered in the initial section. These are easy to follow even by those who have long since forgotten whatever physics they ever knew!

The second section considers the value of ultrasound in the diagnosis of adult extracranial arterial disease. It contains many practical points and considers the various pitfalls which may trap the unwary if a comprehensive ultrasound assessment is not performed. My only criticism is the lack of detail relating to systolic and diastolic velocities with different degrees of stenosis. These and other measurements when assessing the severity of any stenosis, particularly in view of the need to know if a stenosis is more or less than 70%. This section covers only one tenth of the whole book which is surprising given this is the primary use of adult neurosonology; maybe the reviewer is biased!

The middle sections of the book review adult transcranial Doppler (TCD) and embolus detection with Doppler ultrasonography; this takes up almost a third of the book which seems a little excessive given their present clinical value. There is then a short section on echocardiography followed by a long section on paediatric neurosonology which covers a quarter of the book. The penultimate section discusses intraoperative and perioperative monitoring. Finally, there are chapters on neurosonography in clinical practice and most importantly an appendix which discusses professional training guidelines, quality assurance, and accreditation of vascular ultrasound departments. These later issues are of the utmost importance: it is interesting to see how some countries encourage or even insist on the certification of both individuals and laboratories before they are allowed to submit reports. The more widespread application of such standards should be supported. This book is comprehensive and well written although at times a little uncritical; unfortunately, because it is a multi-author text, several topics are covered more than once (for example, vasospasm, brain death).

The overall balance of the book needs to be reviewed. Few clinicians, radiologists’ or technicians would be interested in the book as a whole. The assessment of adult extracranial arterial disease, TCD, embolus detection, echocardiography, paediatric neurosonology, and operative examinations will be covered by a variety of different hospital departments in the UK. However, this book serves as a useful reference to the full range of conditions where neurosonology may have a role.

PIETER HUMPHREY


This is one of the best known and used reference works in neurological surgery. It has been a pleasure to review and although I have not read each volume from cover to cover, I have used the text for advice and a second opinion on cases I have dealt with over the past few months. It has also been used by trainees in the department whose opinions have been equally complimentary.

The book is well illustrated with radiological images which have been well chosen and are reproduced with great clarity. The histological photomicrographs are less clear, mainly because they are in black and white and their relevance outside a pathological textbook is questionable.

Despite the pace at which new information is becoming available there is still an important place in neurological surgery for a large reference book that gathers together the views and experience of some of the most experienced practitioners in the field. All textbooks, however, run the risk of becoming obsolete before they are published and although there is much that is changing in neurological surgery there is also a great deal of background information and shared experience that will remain as the foundations of neurosurgical practice for many years. Whilst keeping an open mind and preparedness to change we should also be wary of too readily forgetting the lessons learned by those who have gone before us much as that we now take for granted. We should learn by other people’s mistakes and take care not to reinvent too many wheels. Out of approximately 340 contributors 12 are from Europe (two from the UK), seven from other parts of the world, and the rest are from the USA and Canada and so this textbook has a strong North American bias. This reflects the reality of contemporary neurosurgery where much of the innovative work is carried out in the United States. This arises because plentiful resources and superspecialisation allow for the concentration of rare and uncommon conditions in major centres which gives unrivalled opportunities for audit, research and development.

The sections of the book I have read in detail contain information which is for the most part up to date and relevant. Many of the authors have opinions which correspond to my own. Whether this reflects on the adequacy of training in the UK or is merely evidence of a closed mind is debatable. At £580 this reference work is remarkably good value, especially when compared with the price of other textbooks in specialised fields. Not only should all neurological departments have a copy for their trainees but I suspect many consultants will wish to have a copy for their own personal use.

RODNEY LAING


With an increasingly aged population, the social and economic impact of Alzheimer’s disease on society becomes more apparent. This multi-author one-volume text aims to provide an overview of recent scientific and clinical advances in our knowledge of this condition, although focusing on clinical diagnosis and management. The largely North American authorship comprises geriatricians, neurologists, psychiatrists, and psychologists.

It should be remembered that a diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease Alzheimer’s disease can only be made histopathologically. By contrast, most of the study chapters are concerned with the clinical diagnosis of Alzheimer type (DAT), which is a clinical diagnosis made on the basis of diagnostic criteria. These criteria are discussed in the introductory section, as are the pathological features.

Next, there is a detailed section on diagnosis. The chapter on clinical features is excellent, as is the one on clinical pointers to non-Alzheimer’s disease forms of dementia, although the latter is limited in length. Investigations are then discussed. While formal neuropsychology and structural imaging are clinically indicated, functional imaging and neurophysiology are currently of research interest.

The natural evolution section discusses prognostic factors and how to stage the illness. The typical patterns of deterioration of cognition, mood, and behavior and functional autonomy are also covered.

Psychopharmacology of Alzheimer’s disease is covered in four chapters, ranging from antipsychotics, agents aiming at improving cognition, to those which attempt to halt or slow the disease. There are also sections on community and institutional management, and ethical and legal issues.

This text is a comprehensive one-volume account of Alzheimer’s disease. Despite being multi-author and multidisciplinary, it is well edited and has a uniformity of approach. It is broad in its scope, and each chapter is extensively referenced. Given that it is a textbook on Alzheimer’s disease rather than the dementia, the brevity of the chapter on non-Alzheimer’s disease dementias cannot be regarded as a fault.

It would be wrong to criticise a book for not being something it did not set out to be. However, clinicians may wonder whether a textbook covering all the dementias, such as Dementia by Burns and Levy, might not be more appropriate to their needs.

JOHN GREENE
therapy, thus drawing together a literature spread through a wide range of journals, usually unfamiliar to the neurologists who are none the less asked to give clinical opinions.

This book is easy to use for reference. The drawings, photographs, and tables are excellent. Only a relatively short and predominantly north American bibliography is provided for each chapter and there are very few references cluttering up the text. The text is clearly written, albeit in a somewhat utilitarian style. Engaging prose can be found in Shuftell's chapter on "Headache", a topic which must be the forte of any ambulatory neurologist. He makes a cost-free therapeutic suggestion of dazzling attractiveness in recording how Dr John Graham commented to a school teacher with chronic daily headache and migraines "what a shame that your migraines have deprived your students of such a wonderful and dedicated teacher". I am not so keen to try his other suggestion of asking such a patient to describe their typical day from morning to evening. On page 307 we read that "two patterns of [amphetamine] abuse exist. Truck drivers, housewives and students employ oral preparations; . . .". Fellow Updike readers will be surprised to find later in the same chapter that American housewives are not singled out as particularly likely to abuse alcohol.

I found this a useful book to keep on my desk and look up issues which had arisen on ward rounds or in the clinic. It achieves its purpose with distinction.

MICHAEL DONAGHY


This volume is one in a series of reports from workshops designed to promote interdisciplinary and international exchange of scientific ideas. Delegates are established scientists with international reputations, and this particular volume is the result of a meeting on the cellular and molecular mechanisms which may underly higher neural functions. As the editors point out, neuroscience has progressed over the past 10 years on many fronts, and at a number of levels from molecular and cellular, through systems, to behavioural. This workshop set out with the ambitious aim of trying to bridge gaps by taking a number of important scientific findings at one level and attempting to relate them to understanding at a different level. In practical terms, this was done by four separate groups which aimed to examine the following: the interface of behavioural plasticity and cellular processes, how neural circuitry can be affected by neuro-modulators, how cellular mechanisms can affect long term potentiation, and the molecular mechanisms which may be involved in plasticity. The discussion was centred around a small number of key papers presented by delegates, following which each group produced a report based on a number of well-defined principles, outlining outstanding questions, and indicating future directions. For example, the first group's discussion was centred round examples of behavioural plasticity for which claims have been made of a direct relation to certain cellular processes studied in vitro, such as the effects of long term depression on cerebellar learning. They set out to examine whether current models are satisfactory for studying neural plasticity, whether better models might exist, and whether some mechanisms for learning are being overlooked completely.

One of the ultimate interests in studying molecular and cellular mechanisms in neuroscience is to try to understand how these processes come together to produce neural function—that is, behaviour of various sorts. For this reason, there is much of interest in this for neuroscientists and neurologists alike. In addition, the attempt to make sense of current data derived from different disciplines is an exercise which is rarely performed in other settings, such as journals or textbooks. Unlike many volumes originating from conferences, this is not simply a collection of recent advances, but has drawn on classic background research to extract important principles about the way in which the brain may function. As such it is of wider appeal and should have a considerably longer shelf life.

ANNE ROSSER

SHORT NOTICES

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