
The authors of this book have set themselves a fearsome task, although on their own terms, since they have selected the topics to be reviewed in order to provide a book written for non-neurosurgeons that deals exclusively with the changing pattern of neurosurgery (prefix). Their aim is to give the non-neurologist a broader view than that provided by contact with their local neurological colleagues. The book consists of 28 review articles, ranging over a wide variety of topics in cranial and spinal surgery, some of minority interest; the 29 contributors are all North American neurosurgeons, many with international reputations. The topics vary from narrow themes, such as hemifacial spasm to broader subjects like spinal trauma. Consequently there is a regrettable variation in standards between contributors and not all reach the excellence achieved in Sweet's review of theroacoagulation for trigeminal neuralgia. There is a welcome levelling of basic science in contributions dealing with perioperative management and brain tumours. In places, however, dogmatic attitudes appear as in recommendations about pre-operative monitoring, or in the brief total rejection of transfrontal craniotomy for pituitary tumours. Overall these approaches of a technical and aggressive kind are not over-emphasised in British neurosurgical practice.

It would be neither possible nor practical to review each contribution individually, but three patterns predominate. The first group comprising four-fifths of the material is a fair summary of the topic, with good illustrations and adequate references. The second group consists of very weak accounts, the section dealing with normal pressure hydrocephalus completely fails to provide any new or useful information. The remaining reviews are of narrow topics by very expert and experienced surgeons, the contents of which would be more useful to other surgeons. Herein lies the weakness of the concept, since this book can lead a non-neurosurgeon to expect a mortality of only 5 per cent from basilar aneurysms, or the completion of an end to side vascular anastomosis in 20 minutes; technical feats which are not currently commonplace here, nor possibly throughout North America.

The publishers are to be congratulated on the high standard of presentation, with a clear typeface, and immaculate reproduction of the line drawings and radiographs. The price (£22) is reasonable and this book would be a valuable acquisition for trainee neurosurgeons as well as neurologists.


The title 'Handbook' might suggest that this volume, the third of six dealing with so-called biological psychiatry, would give comprehensive coverage to psychiatric genetics and to the neuroendocrinology of psychiatric disorders. Psychiatric genetics is discussed in detail with separate chapters on schizophrenia (a very readable account by Rosenthal with clear principles and not an excessive amount of detail), on affective psychoses and on neurosis, psychopathy and alcoholism (these two by Zerbin-Rudin). In a final chapter Mendlewicz briefly discusses the significance of the genetic findings. This whole section can be warmly recommended as a succinct account of modern psychiatric genetics; mental handicap is not considered.

The larger section on neuroendocrinology is rather disappointing, not because of the quality of the contributions but of their rather selective nature. There are two chapters on the interrelationship between neuropharmacology and neuroendocrinology and two on the neuroendocrinology of sexual and gender-related behaviour. Psychosocial dwarfism, anorexia nervosa, the response to stress in mental illness, and the neuroendocrinology of sleep are all considered. The only account of neuroendocrine abnormalities in major psychiatric disorders is given by Carroll, unfortunately he largely confines himself to the dexamethasone depression test in depressive illness. An opportunity missed, I fear.


This is a curious book in which two separate complications of phenytoin therapy, that is teratogenicity and gingival hypertrophy are discussed in some detail. It is a multi-author work which seems to be based on an American symposium, as some discussion by the participants is included. All the authors are from the United States except for one French and one Norwegian contribution; the latter is inexplicably on another topic—the effect of phenytoin on the immune system! No explanation is given for associating the two separate main themes, each of which is disappointing in many respects. Clinical aspects of each topic are quite adequately covered. The review of the epidemiological studies of anticonvulsant teratology is brief and incomplete, although the more comprehensive discussion of the statistical problems and difficulties in interpreting epidemiological data is pertinent. In view of the latter it is difficult to understand why the focus of this book is only on phenytoin and the possible teratogenic effects of other anticonvulsants omitted. In both topics the emphasis is on experimental studies, but no great light is shed on the mechanisms involved for either complication and there are some glaring omissions. No attempt is made to summarise or synthesise the data emerging from the various experimental approaches. The imbalance of the book is illustrated by the introductory chapter on epilepsy management. It might have been expected that the clinical use of phenytoin would have received particular attention. In fact this drug is discussed in a few lines and more space is devoted to carbamazepine and valproic acid. This book can only be recommended to research workers engaged in experimental studies of these topics.

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