
This book is an authoritative treatise based on a lifetime's interest by the author in the problem of patients with low back pain. The section on anatomy and bio-mechanics gives an excellent start to the book, although the most recent reference in this section is 1974. The examination is clearly written and well illustrated, including the examination of the patient standing which is too frequently omitted in clinical practice. The electrodiagnostic section is a short basic review of the subject, but gives no real guidance as to its value in patients with low back pain. Radiology, including contrast examinations, is well covered, but certainly in this country a water soluble medium is preferred universally and this section does not come down strongly enough in its favour. The description of the findings and the technique is clear, lumbar epidural venography is well reviewed and the section on computerised body tomography is a model chapter.

Spondylolisthesis, bone infection, primary and secondary tumours are clearly described, but I would have liked more information on the differential diagnosis of low back pain due to the occasional patient with an intra-abdominal cause. Also the very short section on ankylosing spondylitis is inadequate and still perpetuates the old idea that this is a form of rheumatoid arthritis, from which it is quite distinct.

This book is surgically orientated with good descriptions of indications and techniques of surgery for disc or spinal stenotic disease or spinal instability. The section on physical treatment is clear, but the lack of good controlled trials make it difficult to accept all that is said. The good section on different types of manipulative treatment could be expanded; they are widely used and probably effective in many patients although they have not been submitted to adequate control trials. The author provides a reasoned review of sclerosing injections and of rhizotomy. Lumbal and sacral epidural injections are described in detail, but we would not usually do a reticulogram first as suggested, we reserve this invasive investigation for patients probably needing surgery.

In summary, this is a book that should be read by all interested in low back pain, the illustrations throughout are excellent, the text is clear, but there should be more emphasis on the need for careful surgical management of low back pain if the book is to be fully comprehensive.


For generations the experimental study of brain and behaviour was dominated by the lesion technique. The investigation of some brain systems advanced materially with the use of this method of localisation of function in cortex being a striking example. Subcortical and brain stem mechanisms proved less amenable to the focal lesion technique. Systems based on hierarchical levels of organisation and the intermingling of parallel and sequential pathways are not easily understood if one interferes with an isolated part of the system. The 1960s firm evidence was presented that chemical transmitters existed in brain and that various transmitter were localised to discrete yet widely projecting circuitries of brain. Acetylcholine, the catecholamines, noradrenalin and dopamine, the indoleamines serotonin, inhibitory transmitters like...