
This book can be considered to be very much in two parts. One part consists of a review of current research into the mechanisms of migraine, and as is customary leaves the reader somewhat confused as to the likely front runner. What emerges is the present insecurity of the vasodilatation-vasoconstriction theory of the traditionalist, and the reiteration of work on platelet dysfunction and serotonin with the addition of some recent researches. The cerebral blood flow studies in migraineurs are well covered. The chapter on investigations in migraine properly concludes that at this time no specific diagnostic test exists, but goes on to describe a wide variety of complex tests involving platelet function.

The remainder of the book is largely clinical in content and deals with the subject very well on the whole. In the chapter on examination of the patient, the general examination does not mention the measurement of blood pressure, and under the heading of Necessary and Informative Investigations one would have thought that the necessity for carotid artery ultrasound, facial thermography and digital subtraction angiography is muted.

Some terms will be unfamiliar to the United Kingdom reader, such as chiro-oral migraine, but the chapters on management understandably reveal little that is new, apart from the introduction of calcium channel blockers. The chapter on muscle contraction headache emphasises the lack of objective evidence that any excessive muscle contraction in fact exists, and the chapter on cluster headache is well written.

The chapter on headache in the emergency department is particularly commended. It is a topic not often dealt with in standard texts, is well written, and as well as being a very useful practical guide to casualty physicians, is pleasurable reading.

The author defines an experienced clinician as one who has made lots of mistakes, and the book is almost worth reading for this chapter alone. The references are comprehensive, and the book can be recommended both as a reference for the researcher in migraine and as a guide to the practicing clinician. Although somewhat disappointingly produced, it is very reasonably priced.

JG GRAHAM


The 15th volume in the series, Major Problems in Neurology, concerns itself with headache and the problems of diagnosis and management. Hitherto the monographs in this series have been written by one, two or three authors but Dr. Hopkins has brought together 17 individuals contributing to 13 chapters, some chapters being presented by two authors in association. The editor of the series comments that the reason for this change will become clear to the reader as he works his way through the volume. We are presented with a combination of essays dealing with all forms of headache, worldwide, with contributions from Hong Kong, London, Cardiff, Melbourne, Pittsburgh, Copenhagen, New York and Kansas City.

We are reminded of the extent and importance of the problem of headache in the initial chapter written by the editor and his associate from Kansas City, a comparison being made between the importance of the problem both in the UK and in the United States; certainly headache is a major problem in terms of incidence.

Ziegler in Chapter 2 discusses the importance of epidemiological surveys and there then follows a chapter on headache as seen by a neurologist, a comprehensive chapter mentioning perhaps too briefly the types of headache which can be categorised as acute, of recent onset, chronic and recurrent and headache with focal neurological symptoms, that is, the migraine complex. Vascular headache, headache of raised intracranial pressure and other headaches are discussed. The author considers the problem of investigation of headache and quotes Laffey and colleagues “That headache was the commonest reason for a scan but had the lowest percentage of abnormal findings.” With Bohmalk’s slightly contrary view “I encouraged primary physicians to screen headache patients with CT scans, when the penalty for being clinically incorrect is so severe.”

The author then addresses the problem in a carefully argued resume and I feel no one would disagree with his conclusions. He considers the question of specialised headache clinics, presents us with quotations from their supporters but leaves us a little uncertain as to his own opinions of their value.

The pathophysiology of classical migraine is carefully considered by the joint authors from Copenhagen and New York. John Graham writes a very workmanlike and valuable chapter on “Cluster Headache and Pain in the Face” and considers the difficult problem of “atypical facial pain”. Many of us would feel that a claimed success rate with the use of a tricyclic antidepressant of 81% is perhaps more than we can achieve and Graham’s statement that treatment is “quite successful” whilst quoting Feinmann’s claimed success rate, perhaps underlines his own slightly more pessimistic experience.

Jannetta’s views on microvascular surgery in the posterior fossa bring us up to date and the chapter on “Post-herpetic Neuralgia” is comprehensive, especially in those paragraphs devoted to management and treatment.

There is nothing new in the field of cranial arteritis, but from St. Thomas’s Hospital the authors provide us with a clear account of its clinical features, the importance of complicating visual failure and its management in a very well illustrated chapter.