
It is not surprising that something of a research industry has developed on the back of epidemiological studies of multiple sclerosis. Surveys are easy to carry out, if somewhat laborious, and they generate concepts through the use of large numbers, thus satisfying both the intellectually curious and the statistically cognizant. Over the last decade, population based surveys of patients with multiple sclerosis, involving many thousands of cases, have defined the natural history of the disease and show surprising consistency of results despite marked variations in methodology. Multiple Sclerosis: Its Impact from Childhood to Old Age summarises the clinical experience of 660 patients with multiple sclerosis from Gottingen studied over the last 15 years. The clinical features in this cohort are considered on the basis of age with a further emphasis on practical aspects of the disease, its treatment and management. Others have described more cases, but Professors Bauer and Haneefelz establish beyond doubt, that multiple sclerosis can manifest in childhood and the diagnostic pitfalls and presentations in this age group are well described. The clinical features in young adults from Gottingen provide a comprehensive survey of symptoms and signs, each analysed in sub-groups defined by age, duration of the disease and disability, and with many useful tables; but the authors do not make clear that these frequency data are not point prevalence morbidity statistics or lifetime risks for individual manifestations of multiple sclerosis observed in their population based cohort. In older age, the practical issues are disability and the causes of death in individuals with multiple sclerosis; here, Professors Bauer and Haneefeld discuss in detail the often neglected issue of suicide in multiple sclerosis. The book concludes with a critique of management which contains useful guidance on what is offered by state and charitable institutions in different countries. Throughout, the approach is practical and—despite the epidemiological substrate for this monograph— retains an emphasis on the individual with multiple sclerosis as person and not as statistic.

As the latest issue in the Saunders Major Problems in Neurology series, individuals will do well to buy this volume and keep their collection intact.

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