We read with interest the recent paper by Benabarre et al of the first reported case of endoscopic third ventriculostomy (ETV) for severe psychiatric complications.

In our department, we also had a patient who developed severe psychiatric symptoms after an endoscopic third ventriculostomy (ETV).

A 45 year old woman with an aqueductal stenosis underwent an ETV because of progressive gait and visual disturbances. In November 1997 she underwent an ETV through a right side precoronal burr hole using a rigid neuroendoscope. The third ventricular floor was perforated with a 4 French Fogarty catheter, the perforation being enlarged with the inflatable balloon. No problems were encountered during the procedure, although we noted an incomplete septum pellucidum. After ETV her gait and visual disturbances gradually resolved. However, after the procedure the patient was nervous and agitated, and she complained of a crepitating sound in her head and behaved aggressively towards her spouse. Because her complaints and behaviour worsened a psychiatric evaluation was performed. Psychotic depression was diagnosed and three weeks after the ETV she was admitted to the department of psychiatry. For several months she was treated with antipsychotic and antidepressant drugs and her psychotic depression partially resolved. She is still being treated for mild depression.

Postoperative magnetic resonance imaging six weeks, three months, and one year after the ETV showed no normalisation of the ventricular system, but no other abnormalities were seen.

Signs and symptoms were abrupt and probably organic because of the apparently strong relation between the procedure and the start of the psychotic depressive episode. Previously, the patient had no psychiatric complaints and had undergone other invasive procedures under general anaesthesia and admittance to the hospital. It is not clear how this psychotic depression after ETV can be explained. Sometimes when ETV is performed, injury of the fornix is seen. The fornix constitutes the sole efferent system from the hippocampus and both are involved in the limbic system. The limbic system has an important role in mood and emotional behaviour. We hypothesize that in this patient a combination of incomplete septum pellucidum and an injury of the fornix may have caused an organic personality syndrome after ETV. We agree with Benabarre et al that clinicians should be aware of and take into account this potential serious complication of ETV in this so called minimally invasive procedure.

We are satisfied with the clinical interest generated by our case report where we explained the first case of endoscopic third ventriculostomy followed by severe psychiatric complications.

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Reference


Authors' reply

We welcome with interest the letter by J van Aalst and EAM Beuls. Their case report described a patient who developed psychotic depression after an endoscopic third ventriculostomy (ETV). The patient underwent an ETV through a right side precoronal burr hole using a rigid neuroendoscope. In our case the patient underwent surgery under general anaesthesia and a 6.5 mm rigid neuroendoscope (Gaab Endoscope, Storz, Tutlingen, Germany) was inserted through a right sided prefrontal burr hole. In the frontal horn of the right lateral ventricle, following the technique described by Vries and Viñas et al. Fenestration of the floor of the third ventricle to the basal cisterns was performed with bipolar coagulation and enlarged with a 3 French Fogarty catheter. The surgical technique was similar in both cases.

Both patients behaved aggressively but ours developed a severe complication consisting of an organic personality disorder characterised by impulsiveness, physical aggressiveness, binge eating, hypersonia, and impaired memory and frontal executive functions. In our discussion we postulated that a frontal lobe lesion may explain some of the symptoms presented such as the uncontrolled impulses, the aggressive behaviour, and even the binge eating. However, a longitudinal neuropsychological evaluation showed a severe deficit in immediate memory and difficulties in planning and consolidation of newly learned information, which may be best related to damage in the frontal-based structures of the brain: the fornix and its connection to the hippocampus and the mammillary bodies. Postoperative magnetic resonance imaging confirmed the clinical hypothesis.

We do not totally agree with the diagnosis postulated by Aalst et al. Is true that signs and symptoms were abrupt and probably organic because of the apparently strong relation between the procedure and the start of the psychotic depressive episode. However, we think that an organic personality syndrome cannot be conceptually diagnosed after ETV because the criteria Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders category may be a mental disorder not otherwise specified due to a general medical condition. This residual category should be used for situations in which it has been established that the disturbance is caused by the direct physiological effects of a general medical condition but where the criteria are not met for a specific mental disorder due to a general medical condition (such as dissociative symptoms due to complex partial seizures). The diagnosis of an organic personality syndrome requires that the patient suffer a persistent personality disturbance that is a change from the person's previous characteristic personality pattern. Eight specific types are described: labile type, disinhibited type, aggressive type, apathetic type, paranoid type, other type, combined type, and unspecified type. We think that the patient described by Van Aalst et al did not meet all of these diagnostic criteria.

We think it would be very interesting to know more of the clinical aspects of the patient. For example, had this patient suffered from other depressed states during her life? The patient's problem may have been a severe recurrence of a depressive disorder. We agree that these clinical cases should help clinicians to take these potential complications of endoscopic third ventriculostomy into account before indicating this so called minimally invasive procedure.

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Reference

Social phobia in spasmodic torticollis: some conceptual issues

Gundel et al. tackle an important issue of social phobia (SP) in patients with spasmodic torticollis. It is because social avoidance per se may contribute to a significant degree of distress and dysfunction in patients with chronic medical conditions. Also, potentially beneficial pharmacological and psychotherapeutic treatments remain unexplored because of under-recognition of this problem. Keeping these aspects in mind, we would like to highlight certain conceptual and methodological issues.

Firstly, the sample was restricted to patients with ST who required treatment with botulinum toxin. Also, the severity (Tsu) score for the sample has not been mentioned. Hence the sample may not be representative of all patients with ST.

Secondly, life events were assessed for the one year period before the initial manifestation of ST. As per the authors, the mean (SD) duration of illness and cognitive assessment was 11.9 (11.3) years. Although life events were reported in 50% of patients, yet caution should be exercised in relation to this result as elicitation of life events is associated with recall bias in patients with conditions in particular in illnesses of long duration.

Thirdly, 80% of patients with SP were classified as reactive. Though the authors mention that social anxiety had occurred after onset of ST, they do not provide data on the duration of SP, and hence fail to demonstrate a temporal relation between onset of symptoms of ST and SP. Related to this is the issue of primary/secondary/tertiary psychiatric comorbidity. Comorbidity as a concept has different dimensions. As this classification is not followed in DSM-IV, it would be helpful if the authors provide essential details for a better understanding of the same. The authors postulate a subgroup of patients with SP who have symptoms of social anxiety secondary to ST—that is, presence of a probable cause-effect relation. But, this brief report fails to mention as to how this subgroup was identified. Indeed, as is known, to be classified as “organic psychiatric disorders”, certain diagnostic criteria must be fulfilled in both ICD-10 and DSM-IV. Although SP may not be taken as “organic” in origin, yet labelling it as secondary to (or arising out of) ST requires further evidence.

Fourthly, the authors make an important assertion that DSM-IV excludes patients with social anxiety secondary to medical conditions, and this is without empirical basis. In fact, there seems to be no place for such patients with social anxiety/phobia in DSM-IV. On the other hand, ICD-10 is more broad based and less conservative than DSM-IV in terms of identifying various types of psychiatric morbidity. Its potential for broader interpretation and clinical relevance is significant. Thus, ICD-10 is more broad based and less conservative than DSM-IV in terms of identifying various types of psychiatric morbidity in the physically ill. Hence, the DSM-IV criteria do not preclude against the diagnosis of social phobia in patients with ST who required treatment with botulinum toxin. Also, the severity (Tsu) score for the sample has not been mentioned. Hence the sample may not be representative of all patients with ST.

Lastly, the authors adopted a rigorous methodology for determination of diagnostic criteria. But, it seems surprising that no patient was assessed for Axis II diagnosis; anxious-avoidant personality disorder (AAPP). It is the most common differential diagnosis for SP and it has been shown that differentiating it from SP is difficult. Additionally, patients with SP can have premorbid anxious traits (or AAPP) making personality disorders an important comorbid issue. This conceptual and diagnostic overlap needs to be kept in mind before giving a definitive diagnosis of SP as the treatment is influenced to a great degree by the diagnosis. Hence, there is a need to evaluate for an additional or alternative diagnosis of AAPP in patients with SP.

Overall, although, this study provides a database on psychiatric morbidity, especially SP, in patients with ST but the conceptual issues related to diagnosis of SP need to be critically considered.
Executive dysfunction and depressive symptoms in cerebrovascular disease

The article by Kramer et al suggests that subcortical-frontal ischaemic vascular disease is associated with subtle declines in executive functioning and visual memory, even in non-demented patients. The authors compared 27 control subjects and 12 non-demented patients, who were selected after exclusion of major depression, bipolar affective disorder, and other DSM-IV Axis II disorders. We wish to contribute with personal data to this topic suggesting that, even in absence of a clinical diagnosis of depression, depressive symptoms may modulate executive dysfunctions in non-demented subjects with cerebrovascular disease.

We examined 34 consecutive patients with cognitive impairment-no dementia (C1-ND) (mean (SD), age: 78.1 (6.3), range 65–90; years of education: 4.9 (1.7), range 3–10; Mini Mental State Examination score: 24.0 (2.4), range 18–27). The diagnosis of C1-ND was made on the basis of a standardised multidimensional protocol including history, clinical examination, detailed neuropsychological testing, and computed tomography. The presence and severity of cortical, white matter, and deep subcortical lesions and of leukoaraiosis were assessed on computed tomographic film with a standardised visual rating scale. With this method, the patients were quantitatively divided in two groups (below and above the 50th centile) according to the severity of cerebrovascular disease: 17 patients had none or mild, and 17 had moderate or severe cerebrovascular disease. The two groups had similar age (mean (SD), age: 79.1 (6.5) and 76.9 (6.0); p=0.13, t test), functional status (mean (SD), Barthel Index: 85.3 (18.9) and 80.8 (21.4); p=0.57, t test), and comorbidity (mean (SD), Charlson Index: 2.1 (2.2) and 2.2 (1.6); p=0.95, t test). Comparing the neuropsychological tests, we found that the patients in the group with none or mild cerebrovascular disease performed better on Babcock (mean (SD), score: 11.3 (2.3) and 8.6 (3.0); p=0.01, t test), on digit symbol (mean (SD), associations in 90 seconds: 14.3 (6.8) and 11.7 (4.9); p=0.24, t test), on trail making A (mean (SD), seconds: 143.0 (82.6) and 228.2 (157.7); p=0.05, t test), but were significantly less depressed (mean (SD) number of symptoms on Center for Epidemiological Studies depression scale: CES-D, 10.8 (7.2) and 18.8 (6.6); p=0.002, t test). However, when the effect of cerebrovascular severity on all significant variables was weighted in a multi-variante linear regression model, only depressive symptoms maintained the statistical significance (CES-D: β 0.82; 95% confidence intervals, 1.2 to 4.5; p=0.02).

Several studies have shown that depressed patients have a lower performance than non-depressed ones on executive functions. Furthermore, the relation between cerebrovascular disease and depression has recently been established. In their study, Kramer and colleagues performed an extensive neuropsychological evaluation, but failed to take into consideration that depressive symptoms may be detected in elderly population even after exclusion of major depression. On the contrary, we suggest that depressive symptoms need to be considered in the interpretation of even subtle executive dysfunctions in cerebrovascular disease patients.
Clinical neurology


Reviewing an undergraduate text is always quite a difficult task in that one has to approach one's specialty again through fresh and innocent eyes asking the simple question, would I recommend this? The book, in its fifth edition, claims to present a “problem oriented approach” that has been founded on the authors’ experience in teaching both undergraduate students and junior medical staff at the University of California (San Francisco). The changeover in our own universities to this teaching approach made me believe that this would be a particularly enlightening and instructive read. I was especially interested to see how the presentation of basic essential knowledge (neuro-anatomy, physiology, molecular pathogenesis) fitted into such a schema. I am afraid, in the end, that I was disappointed to find the book not dissimilar to the majority of recommended “standard” undergraduate texts. While each chapter follows the similar template of an initial approach to diagnosis, what follows is variable and not what I would regard as problem oriented. For example, while the section on headache does list modes of presentation (acute, subacute, and chronic), other chapters, such as “Disorders of somatic sensation” or “Motor deficits”, present the usual long lists of conditions without balance (what is common and what is rare), encouraging a logical approach to symptom interpretation or developing an appropriate investigative pathway. The book does have its good points in that it is comprehensive with well defined key concepts at the beginning of each section and a colorized lists of references at the end but the therapeutics are patchy, the glossary of frequently used drugs unhelpful, and the account of neurological investigations inadequate. I would not recommend this as an addition to our current undergraduate reading list, as there are better texts available.

While any text entering its fifth edition has proved its worth to many and clearly serves the students of San Francisco well, a true problem oriented text has failed to emerge from the fog around the Bay! A modern text to supplement our new and evolving approach to the undergraduate teaching of clinical neurology remains a challenging agenda.

Ian Bone

Clinical trials in neurology


This much needed book is a gem. If you are involved in a clinical trial make sure you and all your collaborators have read it, before the trial commences. The application of the methodology of the randomised clinical trial has become the absolute test of all new medicines, not only in neurology but also generally in medicine and surgery. Once one is involved in a trial, however, it is difficult to keep a sense of independence, especially that the trial should have a positive outcome—that, after all, is one of the several major reasons for using randomisation and double blinding. This book provides the information the clinician needs to understand how data are collected, how they are analysed, and how their clinical significance should be assessed. Dr Guiloff has assembled an international team of contributors, all with expertise and experience in their subject. The book is organised in two parts. In the first part, general issues relating to ethics, regulatory matters, assessment, measurement, statistics, quality control, and important specific issues, such as the use of intention to treat analysis, handling drop outs in repeated measures analysis, and survival analysis, are presented. Well chosen examples enliven the text and tables. The role of the Cochrane Collaboration and of meta-analyses is considered in separate chapters. The second part of the book is concerned with the application of these general principles to neurological disorders. This section consists of groups of chapters related to ethical issues, trial design, measurement, sample size, data analysis, and critical discussion of the results of large trials in the major neurological disorders. The consistent high quality of these chapters is remarkable in a multiauthored text and a tribute to the hard work of the editor. The book concludes with a review by Michael Broome that should be required reading for every neurologist. This book not only fills a gap on the neurologist’s bookshelf but also will be opened again and again.

Michael Swash

Differential diagnosis in neuro-oncology


This book is written by two very experienced, eminent, and respected European neuro-oncologists. Their book, as described in the introduction is assisting in the correct diagnosis and therapeutic management of patients with neurological syndromes due to neoplastic conditions. The neurological syndromes in cancer patients cover the spectrum of neuro-ontological sites and each chapter is broken down into subheadings of introduction, clinical presentation, main aetiologies, investigations, treatment, and appropriate references. The neurological syndromes covered are altered consciousness, cognitive and behavioural disorders, epileptic seizures, cerebellar dysfunction, visual alterations, cranial nerve and brainstem lesions, spinal cord lesions, diffuse lesions of the peripheral nervous system, focal lesions of the peripheral nervous system, muscle disorders and fatigue, endocrine disorders, and treatment of the main neurological malignant diseases.

Overall this gives a very compact and user friendly description of the major clinical features and disorders encountered in the practice of clinical neuro-ontology. The strength of the book lies clearly in the comprehensive experience of the two authors. They have been able to include common and rarer neurological syndromes into an easily digestible and coherent clinical classification. In particular for neurosurgeons this book will offer a great deal since it provides insights into non-surgical courses of neurological syndromes seen in patients with cancer. This applies particularly to problems related to chemotherapy and radiotherapy, as well as parenchymal syndromes, which are well covered.

While the book will be a useful reference tool for the surgeon, it is rather weak on neurosurgical aspects in neuro-ontology. For example, under neuro-ontological therapy of glioma (p 227) it is stated that “optimal resection (of gliomas) should achieve tumour removal without morbidity.” This is despite morbidities of 10–24% being described in most current series in the literature. There are also allusions to the use of navigation tools in neurosurgery, which will make tumour removal “easier and more complete.” However, at this stage there is no evidence for this. There is also an imbalance in the role of resection versus biopsy in gliomas. A recent Cochrane review found that there is no evidence in the literature to show that neurological outcomes are better in patients who have resection rather than biopsy for malignant glioma. On page 223 it is also suggested that histologically glioblastomas are homogeneous—it is clearly not the case since they are heterogeneous.

There are also minor points in terms of preparation of the book, such as reference 38 in the treatment of gliomas—this is dated 1977 rather than 1997. Rather than 1997 it is rather weak on neuro-ontological therapy of glioma (p 227) it is stated that “optimal resection (of gliomas) should achieve tumour removal without morbidity.” This is despite morbidities of 10–24% being described in most current series in the literature. There are also allusions to the use of navigation tools in neurosurgery, which will make tumour removal “easier and more complete.” However, at this stage there is no evidence for this. There is also an imbalance in the role of resection versus biopsy in gliomas. A recent Cochrane review found that there is no evidence in the literature to show that neurological outcomes are better in patients who have resection rather than biopsy for malignant glioma. On page 223 it is also suggested that histologically glioblastomas are homogeneous—it is clearly not the case since they are heterogeneous.

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As its title implies, this is a practical guide to interventional neuroradiology. All the conditions encountered by the interventionalist are covered in the 15 well chosen chapters. The book is remarkably up to date, given the rapidity of technical change in the specialty. This is a tribute to the author and to Springer, who have produced a high quality, superbly illustrated book of the type for which the publishers are rightly renowned.

The book is written primarily for neuro-ontologists, both those in training and...
those who are “trained” (if there is such a state). There is also something in the book for clinicians—neurosurgeons, neurologists, and, one must not forget, anaesthetists and intensivists, all of whom may be involved in the management of these patients. The sections on pharmacology and haemostasis are particularly useful and it is worth noting that treatment methods in neurointervention are similar worldwide. Some minor differences exist, imposed by the various national regulatory bodies concerned with drugs and devices. The book can nevertheless be studied profitably by an international readership.

It would have been valuable to include something on the natural history of intracranial aneurysms, particularly the rather vexed question of what is to be done with the unruptured group of aneurysms. No more than a passing reference is made to Onyx, the non-adhesive liquid embolic agent, which is regularly used in the United Kingdom for cerebral arteriovenous malformations and less commonly for especially challenging aneurysms. This is a very recent development and should not detract from this being an excellent, up to date book, full of practical advice. I look forward to future editions. This book has already been discovered by our trainees. It is strongly recommended for their personal library and for inclusion in the neuroscience departmental library.  

Paul Butler

Principles of neuroepidemiology
Edited by Tracy Batchelor and Merit E Cudkowicz (Pp 374, £65.00). Published by Butterworth Heinemann, Boston, 2001. ISBN 0750670428

This useful book gives an overview of the epidemiology of neurological disease. It is not fully comprehensive but this is to be expected in a relatively short book of just over 300 pages. It begins with four useful chapters on epidemiological methods, statistical principles, clinical trials, and measurement scales. These are fairly sketchy in parts but provide a worthwhile summary of the general principles.

The coverage of the epidemiology of neurological disease is good, with individual chapters on the 12 most common neurological syndromes and diseases, including back pain, headache, head injury, and sleep disorders, each of which is sometimes ignored in books of this kind. However, there are no chapters on muscle disease or peripheral neuropathy.

The book is rather US oriented. The editors admit in the preface that their “focus was limited to adult neurological diseases occurring in the US.” However, in these days of international research collaboration and electronic communication, it is somewhat disappointing to find that only 2 of the 31 authors were from outside North America. The authorship was also dominated by Boston based clinicians and academics, who accounted for over 60% of the authors. Harvard certainly has a strong tradition of high quality epidemiology but a more varied authorship might have provided a broader perspective. There is also a tendency in several of the chapters for the research that is discussed and referenced to be US based.

Nevertheless, the book does provide a useful overview of the epidemiology of most of the neurological diseases that are common in the developed world. It would therefore be of use to the general neurologist or to the non-clinical neuroscientist with an interest in the clinical burden of neurological disease.  

Peter Rothwell