

Stroke Treatment and Prevention: An Evidence-based Approach

This book represents a typically thorough and conscientious approach by Graeme Hankey to gather together the best of the evidence, where it exists, to help the clinician manage patients with cerebrovascular disease. It is a book of just over 500 pages and 18 chapters, all following a similar structure. The first two chapters briefly discuss, firstly 'the size of the problem of stroke' and, secondly, understanding the evidence. The latter is a particularly useful chapter, leading one through the currently standardised levels of evidence, helping the reader to understand and evaluate critically randomised trials, and also, and more pertinent to this book, meta-analyses and systematic reviews.

Then the book proper begins. Each chapter, looking at different clinical questions or dilemmas (e.g. acute thrombolysis, neuroprotection, anticoagulation, blood pressure lowering, carotid artery revascularisation, etc), follows a similar theme. The first part of each chapter is entitled 'rationale' and describes the arguments believing that a certain treatment might work. Different treatments are then described, the evidence for or against in relation to placebo or other existing therapies, with accompanying forest plots of all included trials. Then, most importantly there is a comment regarding interpretation of the evidence and implications for practice. The latter is largely a comment based upon analysis of the previous evidence,

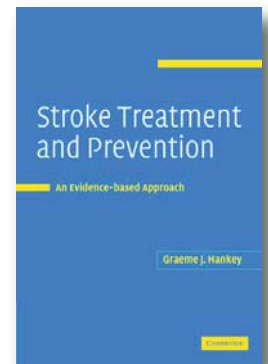
but where such evidence is lacking or controversial, Graeme Hankey provides the reader with potential options to take. Finally, each chapter finishes with a section titled 'implications for research' which brings the reader completely up to date with where a given field was heading at the time of writing and where it might go in the future. There is a final summary for each chapter which is an excellent means of getting to grips with the data in a very convenient way.

Each chapter is of course fully referenced, as are all the studies included in each meta-analysis, and as a rapid source of reference to any clinician dealing with stroke it is the sort of book that really should be on the office shelf.

I would very much hope that in five years time Graeme Hankey will have the energy to update the book as it is an excellent format and he deserves enormous credit for his commitment to gathering such a wealth of trial evidence.

Although much of the data is available through the Cochrane Library (which Graeme Hankey is the first to acknowledge in his preface) his interpretation of the evidence, and his ability to highlight where the data are lacking, incomplete, or need further work, is what makes this work a very worthy addition to the cerebrovascular literature.

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Human Traces

"I am suffering from the limits of my mind," he said. "There is a simple enough problem that I have set out to solve. How our minds work...."

"Yes, I suppose for simplicity's sake, you might say that his guiding light is Charcot and mine is Darwin."

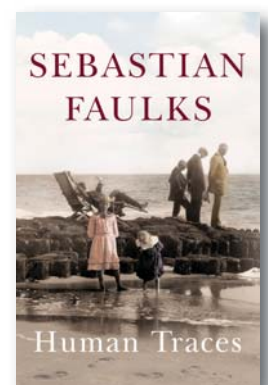
"So a man may first have deduced the existence of his own consciousness by imagining it in others"

"... perhaps for quite simple reasons connected to the limits of their ability to reason, human beings could live out their whole long lives without ever knowing what sort of creatures they really were. Perhaps it did not matter; perhaps what was important was to find serenity in not knowing."

Many writers have grappled with the fundamentals of what constitutes the human mind, consciousness and the soul of a person. Sebastian Faulks in his latest novel explores such issues in the context of the late 19th century running from 1870 to just after the First World War – a time of great change in many differing spheres of life and science. In *Human Traces*, Faulks uses two fictional characters to unwrap the arguments that formed the kernel of the debate in neurological-psychiatric circles in Europe at the turn of the last century, and grapples in particular with the question of whether mental illness can best be understood through a psychological approach fashioned through experiences or a more deterministic one in nature with a basis in genes and evolutionary pressures. These two stand points are adopted by the two main characters- a French psychiatrist Jacques Rebière trained in the ways of Charcot at the Salpêtrière in Paris and Thomas Midwinter, an English physician influenced by his experiences in a London lunatic asylum. These two doctors enter their respective practices with the ambition that they can begin to understand the basis of mental illness, and through this offer cures as well as providing insights into consciousness and what it is to be human. These ambitions are driven by different influences and guid-

ing philosophies- Jacques is possessed by a desire to cure his schizophrenic brother, Olivier, within whom the only memories of his mother are trapped whilst Thomas is encouraged by his desire to understand the creative genius of great artists. After spending formative years in Paris and London respectively, the two aspiring doctors unite and combine their efforts in a sanatorium they set up in the Austrian mountains, and the relationship thickens as Jacques marries the influential older sister of Thomas, Sonia, whilst Thomas marries a patient of Jacques, Kitty. This, however, is no ordinary patient, as she comes to define the difference between the two men and contributes to the unravelling of their friendship and their ultimate destinies. Initially Kitty is seen by Jacques, who explains her problems through some tortuous psychological reasoning, which he regards as being so seminal that he wishes to present her case to a scientific meeting and asks Thomas to read the case history he has written on her. His reading of it, far from confirming the validity and insight of Jacques approach, alerts him to the real problem of her condition and the physical, organic cause of her complaints. The failure of Jacques to recognise his error in this case, coupled to his introspective outlook and philosophy on mental illness, leads him to become more isolated and distant from the kindly, more physically minded and egregious Thomas. Their relationship founders and survives in no small part because of their spouses and their over-arching but crumbling ambitions.

This tension remains despite the sanatorium moving location, and is heightened by the loss of Olivier (and later Daniel, the only son of Jacques and Sonia). In contrast, Thomas and Kitty have two thriving twin girls and seem destined to live out their days happily despite Thomas nearly dying in Africa during a 3-month sabbatical. However, the arrival of the 1st World War causes them to return to their respective countries and, after time apart, the final act is played out. The two become reconciled as Thomas enters



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