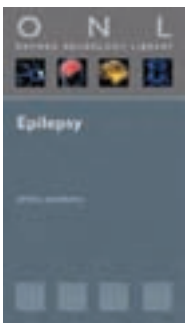
Epilepsy



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Published by: Oxford University Press (2009)
Price: £5.99
ISBN: 9780199560042

Reviewed by:
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There are many books which deal with subspecialties in neurology. Epilepsy has been a favourite subject for authors, and there have been many books dealing with all aspects of care of this complex but common condition. Professor Shorvon has contributed to or edited the seminal UK textbooks on this topic, which made the idea of reviewing this latest offering such a pleasure.

On receiving the book, I did notice that it is, to put it kindly, rather small. I suppose in this environmentally aware, post-credit crunch time, the notion of a small book should tick many of the important boxes. This pocket size would allow the book to be carried around while working (if anyone was allowed to wear the bacterial Death Star that is the white coat – but I digress). Accommodating this diminutive stature, however, the font size has had to be reduced to a level small enough to be a recurrent reminder of my imminent old age.

But enough of this griping about form. The content is the important thing, and it is clear that the information contained is as relevant, clearly written, and pithy as the author's pedigree would promise. There is no wasted space, and the chapter headings are well chosen. Despite its size, the book delivers a breadth of information that is easy on the brain if not easy on the eye. Each aspect of epilepsy care is dealt with and includes sections on patient subsets that leave no group neglected.

I would thoroughly recommend this book to trainees or consultants in general medicine, or to SpRs needing a primer on the basics of epilepsy care. And since time spent on education is never a waste, I would add that consultants - even those with a special interest in epilepsy - will find much to enjoy and commend in this easily digestible book, even if the finishing is accompanied by an acute desire for a pair of half-moon gravitas-adding glasses. Now, where's my cardigan ….?

Head Injury: A Multidisciplinary Approach 1st Edition

This is another valuable guide to the care of patients who have suffered head injuries. One may ask whether there is a need for a book which, after a first glance at the contents page, appears to be a series of topic review chapters. In this era of rapid online publication such a volume might be expected to have a short shelf life as more recent reviews become available. However, this volume provides a comprehensive overview of all aspects of head injury management which will appeal to a wide audience of neuroscience specialists and is likely to stand the test of time.

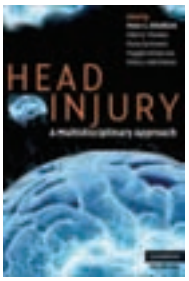
The management of the head injured patient requires input from many different disciplines and the editors of this book aim to provide a concise overview of each of those disciplines. The target audience is, therefore, members of each of those disciplines and the editors have undoubtedly achieved their aim in the 27 chapters which systematically deal with each.

The volume opens with a discussion of the epidemiology of head injury by Giles Critchley and Anjum Memon. This chapter sets the tone for the book. In just ten pages Critchley and Memon define why head injury is such an important problem, describe the basic principles of epidemiology and how this applies to head injury. Their discussion is packed full of the most essential information drawn from a massive body of literature and manages to include a discussion on sporting head injuries in addition to those injuries which more commonly come to the attention of neurosurgeons and neuro-intensivists. The reader is left at the end of their chapter with a summary of take home facts which serves to highlight how important this clinical and public health problem is and serves as a commanding lead-in to the rest of the book.

The subsequent chapters keep to this pattern of dealing with each topic succinctly and this defines the style of the book which remains compact at 309 pages. The chapters are to-the-point, punchy and in many ways down-to-earth in the way they deal with the subject matter. Furthermore, figures are used sensibly to illustrate key points and concepts judiciously. The reader is taken through the key aspects of the neuropathology, clinical assessment, and neuroimaging of head injury, and key aspects of essential neurophysiology and monitoring of the head injured patient. Perhaps what is most noteworthy about this volume, however, is the inclusion of chapters which cover areas which many neuroscience practitioners would not necessarily have had time to read about very extensively. For example, chapter 3 discusses experimental models of head injury which highlights just how heterogeneous this condition is and how important the use of a wide range of outcome measures is in order to achieve the translation from preclinical research observations to clinical benefits for patients.

The latter chapters describe the issues surrounding the surgical management of head injury thoroughly, including excellent chapters on craniofacial trauma and cranioplasty. The final six chapters of this book cover different aspects of rehabilitation, neuropsychology, outcome and prognosis, and medico-legal aspects of head injury and maintain the momentum of the opening chapters.

There is no comparable volume available on the market which takes this multi-disciplinary approach and this makes this volume unique. It should be available to all those involved in the care of the head injured patient or involved in head injury research. In addition to being a must have for every clinical neurosciences department this will also be a valuable guide for individual clinicians and researchers, especially those who are new to the field.



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Published by: Cambridge University Press (2008)
ISBN: 13:9780521697620

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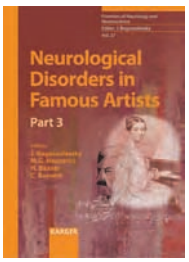
Neurological Disorders in Famous Artists. Part 3.

The two previous volumes in this series have received the reviewer's "thumbs-up" (see ACNR 2005;5(5):37 and 2008;8(1):52) and the latest offering achieves the same rating. It taps into a possibly infinite seam of mixed fact and speculation, which probes the possible interactions between neurological disease and creativity, a subject likely to be of interest not only to many neurologists but also to a lay audience. Here are to be found visual artists (da Vinci, Klee, de Chirico, Schiele, Warhol), composers (Schubert, Robert and Clara Schumann, Wolf, Berlioz, Shostakovich, Bartok), and writers (Stendhal, Cendrars, Pascal, Hemingway, Ramuz, Shakespeare). Diagnostic possibilities investigated include cerebrovascular disease, systemic sclerosis, dystonia, neurosyphilis, opiate misuse, motor neurone disease, chronic pain syndromes, amputation, migraine, autism (from Ioan James, reprising material previously reviewed in these pages: ACNR 2006;6(5):36), and out-of-body experience. Verily, then, a textbook of neurology.

To select one or two morceaux: Brandy Matthews contributes two chapters, one on "Neurology at the opera" which contains the (dismaying?) information that an opera has been written based on Sacks' "The man who mistook his wife for a hat", and one on Shakespeare's portrayal of neurological illness and physicians. The latter seems to perpetuate the face-value acceptance of Iago's assertion of Othello's "epilepsy" (cf. http://bmj.com/cgi/eletters/333/7582/1335, 2 January 2007), and a diagnosis of dementia with Lewy bodies is suggested for King Lear. Would you believe it, but a diagnosis of prion disease has even been advanced for Macbeth (notably not in a neurological journal: Clin Infect Dis 2006;42:299-302)? A section on Shakespeare as therapy concludes with the refrain All's well that ends well, surely a misreading of a "problem play" wherein the King's last couplet (V;iii:327) begins "All yet seems well" (the slogan for any autocracy?).

The most scholarly piece, to my mind, is that of Sebastian Dieguez on Ernest Hemingway. Clearly Dieguez is conversant not only with the oeuvre but also the criticism engendered by it, in framing the multiple diagnostic possibilities (personality disorder, bipolar disorder, head trauma, alcoholism). However, I was surprised to see haemochromatosis in the mix (p. 184,188) since even if, as seems likely, Hemingway had this condition, I thought doubts remained about whether this causes neurological problems (iron does not normally cross blood-brain barrier?). The discussion of "repetition compulsion" in Hemingway's work (p. 196) might also help to explain some of the output of de Chirico ("replay syndrome", p. 44) and Warhol (p. 171), and presumably explains the allure of the Teletubbies.

So, much to enjoy in a generously illustrated volume. Part 4 is keenly awaited!



Editors: Bogousslavsky J, Hennerici MG, Bäzner H, Bassetti C
Published by: Karger, (2010)
Price: €88
ISBN: 978-3-8055-93304

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