Long-Term Management of Dementia

How should dementia best be managed? As the local implementation of the 2009 National Dementia Strategy in England continues to be debated, aided not only by the recent publication by the new government of updated implementation guidance but also, in this period of economic retrenchment, by the QIPPs (Quality Innovation Productivity Prevention) programme, perhaps this US text might provide some helpful insights.

There are chapters on epidemiology (a superb overview), diagnosis, pharmacotherapy of cognition, behaviour management (principally focused on the evidence base for pharmacotherapeutic interventions), management of instrumental and basic activities of daily living, and financial decision making (much wise advice in these chapters), ethical and legal issues, and caregiver stress. There is also a chapter on the role of the primary care physician in dementia management, which seems to envisage a broader role than that undertaken by UK general practitioners in dementia diagnosis.

Although from the US perspective, much that is written here has transatlantic relevance or resonance. As the broad spectrum of topics covered shows, dementia impacts on all aspects of life in ways which many other conditions do not, and hence devising comprehensive protocols for management which are applicable to all patients at all stages of disease remains a significant, and perhaps ultimately, unanswerable, challenge.


This 200-odd page pocket-sized book provides the reader with a brief overview of different aspects of motor neurone disease (MND).

The first chapter gives a summary of various aspects of the disease, ranging from why ‘neuron’ is spelt without an ‘e’ despite the book being written by UK authors, to the epidemiology, neuropathology, and possible mechanisms of the disease. While these topics are understandably not covered in exhaustive detail, it provides MND and non-MND experts with a quick run-through of the salient aspects of the disease.

The second and third chapters are on the diagnosis and natural history of the disease respectively. While the El Escorial criteria for the diagnosis of MND are discussed, there is no mention of the more recently proposed Awaji criteria - a comparison of the differences between these two would have been useful. The authors suggest that ‘it would be exceptional to make a diagnosis of MND without performing imaging’, which I do not entirely agree with as MND is predominantly a clinical diagnosis, as the authors themselves acknowledge, and can often be confirmed by neurophysiology. The natural history chapter examines the different disease presentations and phenotypes and is succinctly informative.

The fourth chapter goes into how MND care best involves a multidisciplinary approach and the personnel involved in this process. The next chapter looks at the different measurement methods of MND. The self-administered revised ALS Functional Rating Scale developed by Mitsumoto’s group would have been useful to mention as it can be of practical use in MND clinics. I am less certain on the usefulness of the relatively long discussions on the use of neurophysiology and imaging as tools for assessing disease progression as these are not sufficiently well-developed for clinical use at present. The sixth chapter gives a nice overview of the genetics of MND, with several illustrations, the family tree and a table of genetic loci of familial MND.

The next five chapters deal with the management of MND, concentrating on potential disease-modifying therapies, symptom management (including respiratory symptoms), nutrition and disability. These chapters go into some detail on the aforementioned issues and provide the reader with quick accessible information, for example the benefits, complications and timing of starting of artificial nutrition. The information in these chapters is useful for the myriad of different healthcare professionals involved in the care of MND patients, ranging from the doctor to the therapists.

Chapter twelve is a practically useful chapter dealing with end-of-life issues. It highlights the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and the area of advance decisions to refuse treatment which are important in terminally ill patients. Chapter thirteen provides a brief overview on aspects affecting the carers and families of MND sufferers. It provides some useful contact information, including that of the MND Association. There is also an appendix of internet-based sources for patients and professionals.

Chapter fourteen discusses briefly other motor neuron disorders, but in the context of this book being a practical manual of MND it is not particularly useful or relevant.

This book is a useful addition to the vast array of neurological books already in the market, not for its size, but for its conciseness.