Stroke syndromes (Second Edition) & Uncommon Causes of Stroke

Clinical Neurology

Alluring from the first idle flick through its glossy pages, this new textbook makes a profound and immediate visual impact. It is sumptuously illustrated, a speaking picture, with this end to teach and to delight. There are over 800 illustrations in fewer than 700 pages. The text, condensed into tables and bullet points, is often reduced to a few paltry lines on a page crammed with beautiful clinical photographs, line drawings, scans, angiograms and pathological slides. The authors and production team should all be congratulated. Many of the clinical photographs and radiographs are the authoritative images from the authors’ personal collections. For instance they have contributed photographs on ulnar nerve palsies, syphilitic rash, Kennedy’s syndrome, leprosy, Park’s disease and even the ascites of hepatic failure! This betrays a curiosity and enthusiasm for areas of clinical neurology well outside the authors’ academic interest of stroke. This engaging openness permeates the book and will undoubtedly project it into the neurological bestseller list. Much more so than the duffel cap doffed at Evidence Based Foreword, the authors claim that they only recommend therapies on the basis of systematic reviews. They soon lose their inhibitions; for instance, second on their list of seven drugs to treat the ataxia of multiple sclerosis is thioridazine, for which there is no literature let alone clinical trial evidence.

Graeme Hankey and Joanna Wardlaw, from Perth and Edinburgh respectively, were aiming to produce a ‘middle-sized clinical neurology’ text, suitable for neurologists-in-training and practising neurologists. They have only one competitor for this slot. The likes of Geraint Fuller, Lionel Ginsberg and, especially, Ian Wilkinson have written condensed readable texts at prices affordable by a medical student. At the other end of the scale, angiography is already known because of previous non-neurological features in a multi-system disease, or because of a relevant family history. But what about the clinical neurologist’s real problems: those patients in whom neurological features occur very early or, worse, if they are the sole manifestation of this rare disorder? Is this where the clinical ‘nouse’ is needed and what most wanted to find in these chapters: little less knowledge and a bit more wisdom, informing me of the flavour of the cases, the differential diagnosis and most importantly the ‘red flags’ which are going to alert me in the first place. These are unfortunately lacking in some of the chapters, whereas the experienced clinician’s perspective shines through in others, for example the contributions from Davis, the editors and from Makri (the clearest short article on arterial dissection I have seen).

By the essential nature of its topics, ‘Uncommon Causes of Stroke’ is the antithesis of the book written by Charles Warlow and colleagues, Stroke: a practical guide to management. Each should have its place. Warlow’s book will help neurologists through everyday practice, providing a very good evidence-base as it does so. This book will be used less often, but for individual patient care may well prove just as valuable. These books will appeal to the neurologist, and in particular the neurologist with an interest in vascular disease, more than those physicians in the UK who routinely look after stroke patients. At £280, departmental libraries should consider them, though their appeal otherwise will be very much to the Stroke Neurologists, a rare breed in the UK.