Book reviews

Clinical anesthesia in neurosurgery

Elizabeth A.M. Frost, Editor. Butterworth Publishers, Stoneham, MA, 1984. \$49.95 US

With the recent explosion of knowledge in the neurosciences and the firm establishment of neuroanaesthesia as a sub-specialty, a need for an up-to-date neuroanaesthesia text is created. A number of prominent neuroanaesthetists have attempted to fill this void and this text is the latest effort to integrate the clinical aspects of neurosurgery and neuroanaesthesia, based on sound basic concepts.

This is a hard-covered book with 480 pages divided into five sections covering cerebral physiology and evaluation, neurosurgical and related procedures, central nervous system trauma, postoperative and intensive care, and cerebral death. The editor is a well-known neuroanaesthesiologist and the authors, primarily from two centres in the United States, include both anaesthesiologists and neurosurgeons. The topics covered are comprehensive and references are extensive and generally up-to-date. The strength of this book lies with the discussion of the basic concepts and the description of neurosurgical procedures. At least half of the text is devoted to the neurosurgical aspects, sometimes down to technical details. However, some of the anatomical terms used may not be readily understood by the average clinical neuroanaesthetist. For example, the term "A1" was used in the description of the Circle of Willis without prior explanation. It is interesting to note that in a number of chapters, the anaesthetic aspects including preoperative visit and premedication practice were written by a neurosurgeon without contribution from a neuroanaesthetist. Although this seems a rather refreshing approach, it has led to some erroneous statements, such as the recommendation against precurarization because of possible potentiation of action of succinylcholine. The chapters on spinal cord trauma and recovery care are excellent, but better editing and organization is needed since much of the information is duplicated elsewhere in other chapters.

The anaesthetic aspects of most neurosurgical procedures are covered, but the quality is not even

throughout the text. In some chapters the discussion is excellent while in others it is superficial, incomplete and occasionally lacks discrimination between experimental and accepted therapy. For instance, in the conclusion in Chapter 20, DMSO was included as a standard treatment for cerebral resuscitation. Perhaps in an attempt to rush the book to the market, there were some obvious mistakes; some references were misquoted and some erroneous statements were made. For example, nitrous oxide was said to potentially increase the volume of an air-containing space 34 times when in reality the maximum is fourfold. Similarly, phentolamine and labetalol were grouped together with verapamil and nifedipine as if they were all calcium channel blockers.

In summary, although useful concepts can be acquired, the beginner would not learn how to administer neuroanaesthesia from this book, and in view of the existence of other excellent texts in neuroanaesthesia (e.g., *Neuroanaesthesia and Intensive Care* by Campkin and Turner, *Handbook of Neuroanesthesia – Clinical and Physiological Essentials* by Newfield and Cottrell) which are less expensive, this reviewer finds it difficult to decide to whom this book should be recommended; perhaps the neurosurgeon who is interested in broadening his knowledge in anaesthesia and the anaesthetist who is interested in neurosurgical technicalities.

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Drugs in anaesthetic practice

M.D. Vickers, H. Schnieden, F.G. Wood-Smith, Butterworth Publishers, Stoneham, MA, 1984. \$59.95 US

The publication of the sixth edition of any textbook must give the author or authors a comforting sense of the acceptance of their work, of its continued demand and of its place on the library shelves and in the hearts of their readers. *Drugs in Anaesthetic Practice* was first published in 1962 and several

generations of residents in training must have been exposed to it and have doubtless carried it with them when their examinations are behind them and they practise what they have learned.

The text is divided into two sections, the second of which comprises the majority of the book. The first section constitutes a review of some fundamental principles of pharmacology. Some of this section is rather less than completely satisfactory. For instance, the dose response curves illustrating competitive antagonism on page eight are confusing and capable of being understood only by those who know the topic well enough not to have to read the subject in this book. I suppose that most readers hasten through this section to come to the meat of the work which is a compendium of information, listed somewhat in the style of a pharmacopoeia, of many drugs in current (and not so current) use. Chloroform, trichloroethylene, cyclopropane and nikethamide are all given their day in court in this work.

To some extent, of course, it must be difficult to define what drugs are properly included in a work on anaesthetic practice. Indeed, it must be difficult to think of any drugs which the practising anaesthetist may not encounter one way or another. Certainly, the authors of this text have continued to be wise enough to avoid restricting their attention only to anaesthetic agents, neuromuscular blocking drugs, etc., which are the daily armamentarium of the anaesthetist but by no means the only drugs he uses or comes in contact with.

This approach, of course, would lead to a work of encyclopaedic proportions unless the authors pruned with diligence and care as indeed is the case with this book. The result, at times, leaves the reader with the feeling that he could do with more information and, of course, there are numerous other sources for this from package inserts to text-books of pharmacology.

In their preface to this edition the authors state that they have reduced the number of references because, on enquiry, they have learned that readers "very rarely consult them." This seems an unfortunate decision to make. If it is true that the references are rarely consulted it gives some clue as to the general readership and their perceived expectations and requirements. In a work of this nature, full and

comprehensive references are almost fundamental. Their absence detracts from the value of the book for the general reader.

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SI UNITS: A practical guide for health professionals

M.J. McQueen, Simole Consultants Ltd., Burlington, Ontario, 1983. \$8.

This is primarily a handbook for those who are involved in the implementation or use of the SI system of units in the health care field. The first thirty-three pages provide a brief explanation of SI, along with some suggestions for those who may be responsible for effecting the change-over to SI in a particular institution. The remaining 168 pages consists entirely of tables and conversion factors to be used in converting results in conventional units to SI, or the reverse. This forms the major part of the book and it is likely that those who purchase the book will do so because these tables can provide them with a rapid and accurate means of switching between the two systems of units.

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