Book & New Media Reviews

The Paths of Pain 1975-2005

Harold Merskey, John D. Loeser, Ronald Dubner (Eds).
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The Paths of Pain takes an interesting approach to resolving the history of pain research and knowledge since the first World Congress on Pain 30 years ago, a time of immense and exciting change. The three editors are well-known figures in the field who have played major roles in the creation and continued success of the International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP).

Thirty-five commissioned chapters by internationally-renowned researchers (many of whom are Canadian) deal with different aspects of pain and pain management, starting with Zimmerman's review of pain concepts and treatment before the formation of the IASP, and finishing with Basbaum's chapter on "the future of pain therapy". Most of the chapters take an historical perspective, tracing the development of knowledge in their respective areas over the past 30 or 40 years. I particularly enjoyed Patricia McGrath's review of the phenomenal growth in pediatric pain research and knowledge (that being my personal area of interest). Merskey provides a useful explanation of the development of the IASP definition of pain and the classification of pain, with which he was intimately involved. Other chapters present brief reviews of the current state of knowledge in a field, such as Dickenson and Besson's fascinating discussion of non-opioid targets for pharmacological control. The topics are wide-ranging, extending from animal models to psychological contributions, and from peripheral to central mechanisms. Opioid receptors, glial modulation, genetics, and brain imaging are all covered, as are specific syndromes such as fibromyalgia, low back pain, cancer pain, and migraine. In most cases, the chapters conclude with suggested directions for future investigation.

This text should be of interest to any professional working in pain research or management, and also to those intrigued by the historical aspects of the rapid development of this domain of knowledge. I enthusiastically recommend it.