

Book Review

Paediatric Neurology (Oxford Specialist Handbooks in Paediatrics)

Edited by Rob Forsyth and Richard Newton. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007. 557 pp, illustrated. \$65. ISBN 978 019 856939

Another pocket-sized handbook, this one from our British colleagues, and advertised as the ideal reference for physicians on "short term attachments in child neurology" or as "an aide-memoire for the more experienced neurologist," is competing for space in white-coat pockets. In 557 miniature pages, the editors offer "an essential reference covering common and rare disorders" as well as "an orderly approach to assessment, investigation and management." They include "real life examples of ward consultations and emergencies" and a "comprehensive pharmacopoeia," and all of this "incorporates North American perspectives on management," presumably provided by the sole North American editor.

The book is divided into seven parts, beginning with "Clinical Approach," which contains chapters on history-taking and examination (including the neonatal neurologic examination). These chapters are generally well-done. A related table, "Diagnostic Clues in External Appearance," links various findings with selected diagnoses, and is less successful, for example, "Big head . . . Most commonly familial" or "Big fontanelle . . . Zellweger." The result is entertaining but can also be misleading. Big head, big fontanelle—why not consider hydrocephalus? "The Consultation" discusses basic principles of managing patient-family-physician interactions. It offers such useful advice as "Read the notes before seeing the child!" and "Is the diagnosis right?" It also covers "Giving the News of Disability" and "Seeing Parents After Their Child Has Died."

The second part of the book, "Neurodiagnostic Tools," is a standard review of the usual diagnostic tests.

Part three is devoted to a standard signs-and-symptoms approach to differential diagnosis. Included are the usual culprits: floppy infant, large head, paroxysmal events, developmental delay, and so forth. The section on epilepsy outlines a proposed revision of the International League

Against Epilepsy classification, and provides a table of epilepsy syndromes, with suggested drugs, that is adapted from the excellent 2004 guidelines from the United Kingdom National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. Unfortunately, this table omits the evidence-based discussion, an integral component of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence project. Similarly, the section on developmental delay contains recommendations for diagnostic tests, but generally omits the supporting evidence.

Part four is similar to part three, except that the discussions are divided by disease. Again, the disorders chosen are those common to other handbooks. The discussions are brief but informative, and there are useful charts and tables. Unique to this handbook is the subsequent section titled "Consults on Other Services." It lists each service with a page of advice regarding the issues that are likely to motivate that service to consult a neurologist.

The section devoted to emergencies incorporates the usual flow diagrams and tables. It is hardly comprehensive, but the pharmacopoeia is particularly useful if the reader wants information on flunarizine or clobazam, which are not currently available in the United States. Also helpful are the descriptions of how to discontinue each anticonvulsant.

This handbook has a flexible but sturdy cover, is well-bound, and has two ribbons that can bookmark important or frequently used pages. The index is easy to read and appears to be accurate.

This volume is well-written, with abundant outlines, lists, and tables. Common to this genre is the lack of references, which denies the reader easy access to the rich (and sometimes controversial) neurologic literature. The editors tried to avoid making this a cookbook of simple recipes by providing discussions, but without references and without an evidence-based approach, this remains a cookbook, albeit more verbose than the typical cookbook.

Paediatric Neurology can be recommended as a rapid primer for medical students and other trainees who want to improve their history-taking and examination skills in child neurology. If house officers feel they must carry a pocket guide, then this one is as good as any.

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