Book reviews


The place of endoscopic anterior surgery in the management of spinal pathology remains controversial. When recommending a book on the subject, do you look for one written by authors who are sceptical, or do you look for a text written by acknowledged experts, who may carry with them a degree of unrealistic enthusiasm? Clearly, a book on anterior endoscopic surgery demands real experience and knowledge, but have the authors carried with them that caution which may dull their enthusiasm? What needs to be stated is the place of endoscopic surgery in our armamentarium, the indications, the training required, the recognition of the need for caution and a comparison with the results of the open approach.

In this book the ‘learning curve’ and the frustrations associated with developing the skills are properly highlighted. The anatomy is beautifully illustrated and described together with the problems of acquiring the necessary equipment and correct layout of the theatre. Training in this field is not just for the surgeon, but for all members of the theatre team.

The indications for a thorascopic approach are described, but here I feel that there is a need for a measured approach. Instrumentation and implants for complex problems need to be designed specifically for thorascopic approaches, but in fact are not in current and audited use. Intelligent humility is an important trait in a surgeon, and there are times when good solid fixation outweighs the benefit of the more limited approach, and can avoid the need for staged procedures.

I think that this book is timely in its publication, takes a balanced approach and should be mandatory to anyone who wants to move forward in this field, but this or any other book cannot replace attendance at theoretical and practical courses designed to familiarise the surgeon with the necessary skills.

T. R. Morley.


This is a significant volume, written by experienced physicians in order to provide guidelines for specific treatment by those physicians with less experience. Its publication is a timely reminder of how much metabolic bone disease initially presents to orthopaedic surgeons and of the responsibilities which they must accept. To some extent, it is positively set against the orthopaedic surgeon. The first sentence of the book reads “Osteomalacia is not a diagnosis but a state of the skeleton ...”. For a surgeon, osteomalacia (or rickets) is the only diagnosis which they need entertain when confronting an infant with severe bow legs, an older child or adolescent with knock knees, or an elderly adult with a pathological fracture or a ‘pseudo-fracture,’ possibly accompanied by tender bones, which is not necessarily due to osteoporosis. Surgeons may feel that the least they can do is to arrange for determination of the calcium biochemistry including the vitamin-D nutrition status and levels of parathyroid hormone; nowadays these investigations are commonplace and reliable. Much more often a surgeon will be confronted with an osteoporotic fracture.

Orthopaedic surgeons now know that they will often be the first medical practitioner to be faced with the duty of diagnosis and to carry the responsibility to alert primary-care physicians or other specialists to the need for further investigation and possible treatment. They should be aware that there are a number of drug treatments which will significantly reduce the risk of further osteoporotic fractures. The same caveats apply to the treatment of Paget’s disease, for example. Statistics are poor and also conflict, but the surgeon would be wise to seek specialist opinion before surgery, which will present a valuable opportunity for fresh investigation. The book ends with a chapter by Dr Roger Smith on rarer types of metabolic bone disease including inherited forms such as osteogenesis imperfecta. Surgeons are likely in any case to seek advice from paediatricians and other specialists. This review merely reiterates the task which they face in recognising the existence of a ‘metabolic bone disease’ which would benefit from further investigation and probably, effective treatment.

T. Stamp.

Books received

