

Book Review

The Epilepsies – Seizures, Syndromes and Management based on the ILAE classifications and practice parameter guidelines. C. P. Panayiotopoulos, Baldon Medical Publishing, Oxford, 2005. ISBN 1-904218-34-2.

Recent events in the United Kingdom have highlighted the necessity of properly trained personnel undertaking the diagnosis and management of pediatric epilepsy. Misdiagnosis and mismanagement of epilepsy are still common, yet indefensible and often catastrophic for the patients. Of course there is no shortage of books that purport to guide the non-specialist or trainee into the subject. Yet on close inspection such books usually disappoint – those with multiple authors are usually out-of-date before they hit the shelves, and monographs are often written by academics perhaps more familiar with the lecture podium than the outpatient clinic. Where then to find a really authoritative text?

We are indeed fortunate that Tom Panayiotopoulos has devoted the early years of his retirement to documenting his wealth of clinical experience of epilepsy derived from decades of carefully observed and documented clinical practice. His experience is unique not only because he came to the field from the neurophysiological perspective, and was therefore able to make insights into electroencephalography/clinical correlation which would escape those who view the subject from a neurological viewpoint, but also because of his painstaking and meticulous documentation and analysis of cases which bear testimony to his vast clinical experience and the hard graft in the outpatient clinic.

Professor Panayiotopoulos' rigorous adherence to and encyclopedic knowledge of the International League Against Epilepsy classification is striking. It is impossible not to be challenged by this book. As an adult Neurologist, with a particular interest in epilepsies, I wonder how many diagnoses I have missed over the years before reading this book. I was struck by some of the fascinating clinical descriptions from patients, for example "I usually have millions of small, very bright, mainly blue and green colored, circular

spots of light, which appear on the left side and sometimes move to the right, but on one occasion suddenly everything went black. I could not see and I have to ask other swimmers to show me the direction to the beach". How commonly do we ignore symptoms described to us in clinic by patients or their careers, assume that the patient has elaborated the experience, or that the patient's symptoms are neurotic rather than organic?

Pediatric neurologists will be equally fascinated by the descriptions of benign childhood focal seizures. The reader will not be disappointed in reading the descriptions of the eponymous Panayiotopoulos syndrome, in particular its bizarre autonomic manifestations. A condition surprisingly common, affecting perhaps 0.3% of the population, seizures comprise an unusual constellation of autonomic symptoms, behavioral changes and eye deviation, often associated with vomiting: "At age 9 years, on return from school, he looked tired and pale. He said that his head was killing him "something that would cause me to be sick". In 10 min he started screaming and banging his head on the wall. Within the next 20 min he gradually became disoriented and floppy "like a rag doll". He was staring". Not surprisingly, such children are often initially diagnosed as suffering from encephalitis. The author is strong on pragmatic advice, such as "The combination of a normal child with infrequent seizures and an EEG showing disproportionately severe focal epileptogenic activity is highly suggestive of benign childhood seizures susceptibility syndrome".

The book obviously has its strengths, but what of its weaknesses? Some will be put off by its appearance – four different text colors, generous use of footnotes, occasional typographical errors and some redundancy in the text are idiosyncratic. The electroencephalograms, which are painstakingly reproduced, will disconcert those of us whose training in Neurophysiology is rudimentary. The CD supplied with the book, containing a goldmine of clinical cases, does not happily run on my Apple Macintosh computer. These are, however, only minor quibbles.

Over the years, Prof. Panayiotopoulos has inspired many who have worked with him to take up careers in epilepsy – it is to be hoped that the current volume will do the same for some who have not had the same opportunity. Highly recommended.

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