

Book reviews

Textbook of spinal disorder

S Esses (editor), 352 pages, Lippincott Company, Philadelphia, 1995
ISBN 0-397-51346-1

Dr. Esses has trained at the University of Toronto in close contact with many well-known spinal surgeons and through the years has been teaching medical students, residents and fellows. They often bemoaned the lack of a single concise textbook providing the basic information needed to deal with spine patients. In accordance with this request, the textbook was written as a general guide presenting factual information concerning the spine in an organized and methodical manner.

Professor Stephen Esses and contributors, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas, have succeeded in achieving this aim. The book is easy to read, instructional, with numerous excellent drawings helping to complement written descriptions of various subjects and thus facilitating the learning process.

The book covers all aspects of spinal care. Each chapter ends with key-points and a well-balanced, although short bibliography.

The first chapter brings the spinal anatomy to a very understandable level including the neural and vascular parts. A description of the pathology of various clinical conditions and developmental abnormalities is followed by another comprehensive chapter on physical examination.

All types of spinal imaging techniques are consequently accompanied by drawn illustrations making it easy to identify the different structures.

The chapter on basic surgical techniques is followed by chapters on degenerative diseases, which cover all essential information on preferred investigation techniques, indications for surgery or conservative treatment modalities.

Well-written chapters on spinal infections, tumors and fractures should be of great help for young spinal surgeons in practice.

The textbook ends by recommending that spinal surgeons participate in prospective outcome studies or, in accordance with the gold standard in countries, such as England and Sweden today, prospective and randomized studies to validate the usefulness, or lack thereof, of surgical and nonsurgical treatments for spinal disorders.

Even if the textbook gives a rather brief overview of spinal care it covers the subject and gives useful comments about each topic. It is useful for students, especially for spinal surgeons in education, but enjoyable even for well-experienced seniors and worthwhile having on a bookshelf.

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Essentials of the spine

J Weinstein, B Rydevik, V Sonntag (editors), 267 pages, Raven Press, New York, 1995
ISBN 0-7817-0251-8

The well-known editors of this textbook have collected an impressive number of contributors with long experience of basic and clinical science, but also of education regarding the spine.

Regular, refreshing and updating of knowledge is necessary for everyone dealing with spinal problems. However, the timelines are restricted and continuous education based on the literature is therefore hard to obtain. This edition was designed to meet that problem, from the resident to the spine specialist.

Compared to *The Textbook of Spinal Disorders*, this volume is more comprehensive. Each chapter is well balanced, starting with carefully prepared key-points and ending with a few very well selected references.

A review of the epidemiology of spinal pain is followed by a chapter on spinal pain syndromes, which states the current knowledge of the basic mechanisms underlying various conditions associated with spinal pain. In the chapter on pathology of spinal disorders, the interesting theory on the consequences of venous pooling between two stenotic levels in the lumbar spine is described.

Making an accurate diagnosis of spinal disorders is generally a very difficult task. In the chapter on the accuracy of diagnostic tests in low-back pain, with or without neural compromise, the reader is given a good lesson. Unfortunately, all available tests are imperfect. This makes it even more important to know the difference between the sensibility and specificity of a certain test.

Information on radiologic imaging of the spine is provided in an instructive and well written chapter. It contains valuable examples on the diagnostic possibilities in different situations, specifying when to order and what to order.

Among the algorithms for investigations and treatments of cervical and low-back pain, the algorithm on multiply operated patients gives much valuable information, not least regarding the diagnosis and treatment or, let us say, nonsurgical treatment of arachnoiditis, epidural scar tissue and discitis.

The chapter on spinal deformities is very enjoyable and includes painful conditions in children. Recurrent or chronic backache symptoms should, of course, be carefully investigated. It is worthwhile knowing that the cause of back pain can be established in 85% of the cases.

This very clearly written textbook ends with 30 case histories covering the field, with questions and answers and a couple of well-chosen references.

The book is easy to read and the text is accompanied by generally excellent illustrations. It fulfils the editors' intentions to be of value and interest for students and various specialists, even those desirous of a career in the study of spine.

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