Book review

Surgery for Juvenile Chronic Arthritis

Urban Rydholm, Ortolani, 136 pages,
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The author is an Associate Professor in the Division of Arthritic Surgery at Lund University Hospital Department of Orthopedics in Lund, Sweden. Dr. Rydholm is presently in charge of all the orthopedic surgery that is performed on patients suffering from juvenile chronic arthritis (JCA), and who have been referred from the Department of Rheumatology in Lund.

In an exemplary and scholarly manner, Urban Rydholm has compiled our current knowledge of JCA and the possibilities for surgical therapy in his book. It must be borne in mind that JCA, being in many ways different from adult rheumatoid arthritis, is, in reality, a heterogeneous group of diseases. The diagnosis is difficult, and it is often established only after considering a long list of differential diagnoses. Further, the course of the disease varies, sometimes with prolonged remissions. The greatest challenge lies in the fact that the disease affects young people during their growth; and the proximity of the inflammatory process to the physis makes growth disturbances sometimes more disabling than the destruction caused by aggressive synovitis.

The author has, obviously, a vast experience himself, and he has the advantage of working in an experienced combined orthopedic and rheumatologic unit: one of the oldest in northern Europe.

In 10 short and easily read chapters, the problems of JCA are presented pedagogically, are well illustrated, and there are relevant references to all the chapters. The disease itself is infrequent, with a ratio JCA:RA of 1:20; but the impact of the disease is important, and not only to the affected child. The chapters on classification, incidence and prognosis, and basic research are extremely well written, and should be mandatory reading for both rheumatologists and orthopedists. Moreover, there is a detailed description of diagnostic imaging, an area in which Lund University Hospital has, in many ways, done pioneering work.

The main topics in the book are naturally the surgical treatment of the various affected joints; and here, the author's position accords with the opinions of the most experienced orthopedists. It is also gratifying to see that the author has emphasized the necessity of such conservative treatment as splinting and physical therapy. It should be emphasized that the good results of surgery in rheumatoid arthritis are definitely dependent on preoperative and postoperative training by the JCA patient.

The effect of synovectomy is discussed. And the author states rightly that "the indication for synovectomy must be therapeutic rather than prophylactic in JCA, i.e. a disease with a high remission rate." In experienced hands, synovectomy is beneficial, and it rarely produces untoward side effects. There is, however, still a lack of controlled studies, mostly due to the ethical difficulty in randomizing for an operation when both the children and the parents alike are highly convinced of the favorable effect of synovectomy.

The illustrations in the book are generally very good. However, one could probably have found a better illustration than Figure 4-10 to illustrate the point in the legend: "The discrepancy between the blown up condyles and the slender shafts as a result of growth disturbances. In the cervical spine the vertebral bodies often show increased height and reduced antero-posterior diameter, the so-called giraffe vertebrae." Otherwise, there are no important objections to the text or the illustrations.

There is, indeed, a well of important information within these 130 pages. The disposition of the different chapters is exemplary. The author has an enviable ability to make even difficult pathophysiologic problems easy to grasp.

In conclusion, this important work deserves to be read not only by clinical orthopedists and rheumatologists, but also by researchers who are interested in this disabling disease. It is easy to predict that this book will become a standard reference in this field of medicine.

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