

Neurosurgery in the Tropics

A practical approach to common problems By Jeffrey V. Rosenfeld and David A.K Watters (Ed) Macmillan Education LTD
2000, Price \$ 50 US ISBN 0-333-68412-5

Neurosurgery in the Tropics is a book, aimed at the general surgeon in a remote setting. As a surgical trainee in East Africa, the possibility of practicing in a remote setting is real. It is with this background that together with a surgeon who has worked in remote areas of Western Africa, we write this review.

The book has an original and pragmatic approach that does not reiterate standard textbooks of Neurosurgery. It is comprehensive and the prose is simple, effective and eloquent. The first chapter on Developing a Neurosurgical Service gives a lot of historical and sociological information, but hardly any information on how to actually start a Neurosurgical service. There is discordance in some of the information given. For example in Chapter one Levy recommends that every surgeon should learn how to perform a Pneumoencephalogram (PEG) - a risky and outdated radiological examination; then later in the second Chapter Rosenfeld and Watters oppose its use.

A major attraction in the book is the plethora of original photographs and illustrations. The authors review multiple neurosurgical problems giving historical vignettes. There should have been a better classification of what can realistically be done in an isolated setting. It is unlikely that a "remote" setting would have the facilities to tackle a posterior fossa tumour. Good references on where to access this information rather than a detailed description would have clarified this ambiguity. The chapter on Common Operations is a highlight, which dispels the myth of the complexity of Neurosurgical operations without glossing over the potential problems and complications that can arise. There should have been more information on the infectious space occupying lesions of the spine for example the Spinal epidural abscess - a Neurosurgical emergency. There could also have been more emphasis on the neurosurgical approach to the AIDS patient, a common disease in the tropics.

There is an impressive list of instruments with addresses for equipment supply, which adds to the pragmatism and utility of the book. The last chapter ven-

tures into the area of Neuro-rehabilitation and medico legal issues thus giving much needed emphasis to this often neglected area in books written for "the Tropics".

On the whole if one were to look for flaws one would be disappointed. The citations are extensive and well researched. There are a few random errors in labels - Is it 4.4c or 4.4d that represents the Dandy Walker malformation in Chapter 4? A more fastidious critic might pick on the use of Developmental milestones in which some of the instruments used are specific to the Western Culture. "Plays Pat a cake and peek a boo, builds tower of 3-4 blocks" are not very applicable in rural Africa. There should have been a note advising users to find a local equivalent. In the next edition more contributions from African, Latin American and Asian authors might reduce the western perspective of the book and ease the task of writing a book which is universal for the Tropics.

The price is a bargain for this concise, pragmatic and well-illustrated book and we recommend it as a useful handbook for Doctors in under-resourced Africa - interns, medical officers and surgeons alike.

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