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BOOK REVIEW

Reuben D. Johnson, DPhil, FRCS; Alexander L. Green, MD, FRCS (eds): Landmark papers in neurosurgery

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I can't resist saying it right from the beginning; this is an excellent book that should be read by every neurosurgeon in training.

The papers they have selected as "landmark" are their choice, and they have avoided publications on surgical techniques.

There are six chapters: neurovascular neurosurgery, neuro-oncology, head injury, spinal neurosurgery, functional and epilepsy neurosurgery, and paediatric neurosurgery.

Each chapter starts with a well-referenced introduction, following which are sections on specific topics all constructed in the same way, like the report of a journal club:

First the details of the studies to be discussed are summarised, then the references of the main studies and related references, allowing to put the main references into perspective. The study design is clearly presented with tables followed by the primary and secondary outcome measures and their results. The above is then summarised in the conclusions. The authors then make a critique based on well-selected references.

This critique reflects the personal opinion of the authors.

For example, considering surgery for lumbar disc herniation, this is very common in practice and an excellent

money-making business. The authors conclude from a Norwegian study that "Surgical treatment was better than conservative management at 1-year follow-up, but this difference became less pronounced over a 10-year period"; from a US study that "Patients received benefit from both surgery and conservative management but no conclusions regarding the superiority of either can be made on an intention-to-treat analysis"; finally from a Netherlands study that "Early surgery for sciatica due to lumbar disc prolapse leads to faster recovery and relief of leg pain. However there are no long-term benefits". Rather sobering, isn't it. In the critique however the authors quote another study from The Netherlands examining cost-benefit pointing out that there appears to be a strong economic argument supporting continued surgery for lumbar disc herniation.

What I particularly liked is that the authors are not afraid to discuss controversial topics.

In addition to the important information provided here, this book will teach the young neurosurgeons in training (and the older fully trained ones as well) how to read a paper critically.

Conflicts of interest None.

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