Book Reviews

(Edited by B. Raymond Fink, M.D.)

Burnell R. Brown, Jr., M.D., Ph.D., Editor


The recovery room is a special place. It provides a transitional time for the patient to regain his automatic control from the anesthetist and to begin to cope with a new insult, the surgical procedure. Effective action in this environment requires knowledge of both anesthesia and surgery, as well as specialized insight into the recovery process. I have been puzzled at the lack of attention in the literature to recovery room medicine or nursing. This book written for recovery room nurses is, therefore, of high interest. It is pleasing that such a timely book is well written and highly informative. It is a good basic text of anesthesia and surgical procedures from a nursing point of view, and would be an excellent training tool for new nurses or a review for the experienced recovery room nurse. I was especially pleased with the addition of definitions sections to some of the specialized chapters, making effective communication between doctor and nurse somewhat more likely.

Its only real drawback lies in being too basic. Occasionally, controversial topics are oversimplified. The bibliographies at the ends of the chapters usually contain only references to other basic textbooks and don’t help the reader to more specialized physiologic or pharmacologic literature, e.g., journals. This is not a major problem, however, and the book succeeds in accomplishing its main objective of providing a comprehensive overview of the recovery process.

I would recommend this book highly as a basic textbook in the recovery room for nurses engaged in that specialty.

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The book follows the usual multidisciplinary format of Dr. Bonica; it provides a panoramic view of many aspects of cancer pain and its control. Its contents are organized in two parts: Part One presents basic considerations on pain, and Part Two deals mostly with pain management. The second part is subdivided into six sections, each discussing a particular treatment modality, and the management of specific cancer syndromes. Although a few ideas are actually new and original, some chapters on neurophysiology, biochemistry and psychology of pain (Part One) are outstanding summaries of difficult and complex issues. Several chapters of Part Two have the old flavor of presentations from the Bonica’s book, The Management of Pain, and some illustrations were actually taken from that classic textbook. In particular, the description of cancer pain mechanisms by Bonica, in his introduction to Part Two, is a masterpiece of descriptive medical writing now, as it was when it was first written in 1953. The section on nerve blocks may be of special interest to the anesthesiologist. However, most of the presentations in this section are disappointing. They seem to be hopelessly grounded in the ancient cable-like model of pain and lead the reader to believe that painful perceptions and conditioned pain behaviors can be modified for a long time simply by blocking peripheral neural pathways, without other forms of supportive intervention. No hypothetical reference is made, nor are any data presented, for alternative, possible modes of actions of nerve blocks, such as deep-stimulation analgesia and massive placebo effects; no effort to frame the role of nerve blocks in long-term comprehensive pain-control strategies is presented. I fully agree with the statement by Dr. Bonica in his closing remarks about the acute need of further clinical studies with the purpose of reassessing the actual role of nerve blocking in the control of painful states, and how this role fits the ever-increasing findings from neurophysiologic and behavioral research. The section, “Ablative Neurosurgical Procedures,” is rich in new techniques for surgical lysis of specific noxious pathways, while the recent approaches to deep surgical stimulation analgesia are challenging, even if their actual effects on pain perceptions are largely uncharted. Personally, I tend to agree with Dr. Pagni’s conclusions in his “General Comments on Ablative Neurosurgical Procedures”: Such procedures are not always the final answer for relief of cancer pain. They may have specific value in terminal malignancy with life expectancy no longer than a few months. One flaw in this book is the little emphasis given to rehabilitation programs for relieving the suffering of cancer patients in conditions of emotional and physical impairment. A recent study (Arch Phys Med Rehab 59, September 1978), has shown that 42 per cent of cancer patients have emotional problems; 30 per cent, general weakness; 30 per cent, failures in activities of daily living; only 27 per cent have pain. The topic of rehabilitation is mentioned here and there throughout the book, but such references are lost in the overwhelming emphasis on the treatment of the disease process, the use of drugs, and the interruption of peripheral nociception. The section, “Psychologic and Sociologic Methods for the Relief of Pain of Advanced Cancer,” is one of the shortest in Part Two. This crucial aspect is briefly mentioned in the Chapter on the Hospice Concept, which is remarkably informative.

In summary, despite its minor flaws, this book will provide a rich source of information and references to those health professionals who deal with cancer patients or may seek intellectual knowledge on cancer pain. However, I believe that the major value of this new Bonica literary effort, in association with Dr. Ventafridda, will be to focus the attention of clinicians, scientists, economists and politicians on the very fact that we are facing a worldwide epidemic of human suffering because of longer survivals from neoplastic diseases, an epidemic which no single individual, technique or effort can control or solve.

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The title of the book is somewhat misleading. I expected much more than the book contains. The subtitle, however, does explain the contents: the book is an annotated directory of early artifacts
related to aviation medicine. The contents are presented in ten
groups, including an introduction, an interesting bibliography, a
short, incomplete glossary of abbreviations, and an indispensable
index key to collections of aviation artifacts. The main text consists,
in order, of annotated lists of goggles and helmets, flying clothing,
protective garments, oxygen masks and regulators, flight medical
equipment, survival and rescue gear. In 122 pages of text there are
83 black-and-white photographs, each accompanied by an explana-
tory text.

Many of the illustrations are the most interesting part of the
book. Unfortunately, too many are of poor quality, showing insuffi-
cient detail to be of value, and have an accompanying text
that adds nothing to the illustration. The positioning of photo-
graphs in relation to text is often confusing. Infuriatingly, the
worst photographs are of static displays of collections still in
existence. Surely, Dr. Benford could have insisted upon better
illustrations. The best photographs, fortunately, are those that are
unique, e.g., Wiley Post working with the pressure suit that enabled
him to reach altitudes between 40,000 and 50,000 feet in 1934.

The introduction is well written, in fact, so stimulating that the
rest of the book is a disappointment. For example: the introduc-
tion mentions "the ingenious demand oxygen regulator used by
the Luftwaffe between 1939 and 1941." However, there is no
functional diagram of the regulator to show what was so "ingenious"
about it; nor is there any description of temporary Allied equipment
to allow an assessment of comparative operational effectiveness
of such developments.

Naturally, much of the book deals with equipment developed
in response to wartime operational needs. I would very much like
to have seen a discussion about how each new development affected
the ebb and flow of aerial combat, and how the physicians,
scientists and engineers working so much in the background
responded to the challenges of operational needs.

Indeed, my main disappointment with the book is its failure to
deal at all with the background of the medicine and physiology
of aviation upon which are hung the artifacts catalogued in the
book. Dr. Benford has merely produced a catalogue of artifacts,
with sketchy, and in the main disappointing, annotations. A great
pity, considering the fascinating opportunities offered by the field.

To my certain knowledge, the book is far from encyclopedic. For
example, an excellent collection of appropriate artifacts is contained
in the Aerospace Exhibit at the North Carolina Museum of Life and
Science; particularly in the collection preserved from the work of
Professor F. G. Hall, one of the pre-eminent aviation physiologists of
the 1930's to 1950's. There is little value for the anesthesiologist
unless he has an abiding interest in aviation, and then, I fear, he is
bound to be disappointed. Certainly, as a reference text, it should be
included in large library collections, but I would hesitate to
recommend it for the more general reader.

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*Essential aspects organized in outline.*