Neuro-oncology is a highly specialized field with patients typically cared for at tertiary centers by teams of subspecialists from multiple clinical disciplines. On the other hand, generalists in medicine, neurology, neurosurgery, and oncology often initiate the evaluation of patients with brain tumors and assist in their care. This first edition monograph of practical clinical neuro-oncology is intended to provide these generalists with (1) a basic knowledge about primary and metastatic brain tumors and nonmetastatic complications in cancer patients; (2) a review of clinical approaches and diagnostic procedures in patients suspected of having an intracranial tumor; and (3) practical information regarding common clinical problems that occur in neuro-oncology patients. The fundamental goal of this new text is to distill this complex clinical subspecialty to its essentials and serve as a practical guide and reference for the general practitioner. This is a tall order, and the book succeeds on some levels and falls short on others.

The concise and small, but not pocket-sized, volume contains 54 chapters in 7 parts. Most of the chapters are short—only 3-5 pages in length—and all can be read rapidly. Part I is a general introduction to primary CNS tumors, CNS metastases, and genetic syndromes and risk factors. Of these topics, the presentation of genetic risk factors is the strongest, most current, and most likely to serve as a valuable reference for the general clinician. In contrast, the relatively lengthy section on nongenetic risk factors is excessive and potentially misleading. Parts II-IV focus on clinical presentations, approaches to clinical evaluations, diagnostic imaging, and essentials of radiation therapy and chemotherapy. These chapters include a number of very useful comprehensive tables listing, for example, clinical syndromes, CT/MRI features of neoplastic and nonneoplastic brain lesions, cerebrospinal fluid findings, and common chemotherapeutics, including doses and typical toxicities. These tables provide a wealth of information, but consequently are somewhat unwieldy. Part V focuses on diagnostic and clinical issues for specific primary and metastatic brain tumor types, building on the more general information presented in the earlier chapters. Inclusion of treatment-related brain toxicity and the contributions of modern imaging tools, such as PET and MR spectroscopy, in distinguishing toxicity from tumor progression would have been particularly helpful to general physicians who often participate in follow-up care for patients with brain tumors. In the chapter on CNS lymphoma, it is surprising that osmotic blood-brain barrier disruption—a highly specialized, controversial, and relatively unavailable therapy—is discussed, whereas a seemingly equally effective and much more available regimen consisting of high-dose intravenous methotrexate monotherapy is not mentioned. Parts VI and VII focus on a number of common clinical problems experienced by neuro-oncology patients, such as anorexia, gastrointestinal dysfunction, depression, insomnia, hiccups, bladder dysfunction, and pain. These problems can substantially compromise quality of life and may have relatively simple and easily correctable causes, or they may represent serious life-threatening complications. Inclusion of these often neglected topics is one of this monograph’s strengths.

One shortcoming throughout this text is the lack of algorithms prioritizing specific diagnostic and therapeutic approaches with emphasis on those most likely to be productive. Instead, differential diagnoses and treatment
options too often appear as lists or tables that do not convey the kind of filtered clinical judgment expected from a practical guide to patient care.

This clearly written monograph offers a relatively concise overview of clinical neuro-oncology. The brief lists of references in each chapter are generally well selected and direct the interested reader to more focused reviews and an occasional primary article of particular importance. As a first introduction to neuro-oncology, medical students and clinical residents are more likely to find this monograph of value than its intended audience of general practicing physicians.

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