
Ultrasound-based regional anaesthesia has advanced rapidly over the past decade, and is now a day-to-day practice in many anaesthetic departments. One of the most prominent advocates of this technology has been Dr Marhofer and his colleagues from the Austrian Regional Anaesthesia Group. This small paperback is based on the teaching and experience of this group, and, as the title correctly claims, is a guide on the principles and practical implementation of ultrasound-guided nerve block.

As such, the book can be divided into two sections. The first part covers the first principles of ultrasound-based regional block, and the second part concentrates on the practicalities of specific nerve blocks.

The first two chapters describe the basic principles of ultrasound in-depth and the potential advantages of the technique. I was glad to see Chapter 3 devoted to a discussion of the limitations of ultrasound-guided block because many trainees are frustrated by their inability to see the needle and its tip. Like every other technical medical intervention, there is a learning curve for every anaesthetist, although a book of this type is probably too small to delve into issues surrounding training issues. Chapter 4 emphasizes the organizational prerequisites for ultrasound block such as aseptic technique and probe preparation. Thus, the first four chapters summarize nicely the basic first principles of ultrasound block and I would suggest are essential reading for any trainee about to embark on this procedure.

Chapters 5 and 6 together describe the appearance of peripheral nerves, needle guidance techniques, and sensible practical advice in Chapter 7 as ‘pearls and pitfalls’. All in all, these chapters have important relevance to training in human volunteers and practice needle injection into laboratory phantoms.

The later chapters discuss neck blocks (Chapter 8), upper extremity blocks (Chapter 9), and lower extremity blocks (Chapter 10). The images of these common techniques should be familiar with all regional anaesthetists, but do provide a nice aide-memoire to trainees.

There were some aspects of the book I was slightly disappointed with. The clarity of the ultrasound images was not as sharp as it could be. There was little reference to transversis abdominis blocks, despite their undoubted popularity; and a chapter on central neuraxial block would have been very interesting.

The book finishes with chapters on catheter techniques (Chapter 12) and a glimpse into the future (Chapter 13).

Overall, this is an excellent handbook, written by individuals with considerable experience. Any criticisms I have are relatively minor. The book is very well written, is illustrated with 100 colour photographs and 40 black and white photographs, and provides an excellent introductory text to trainees starting a clinical rotation in regional anaesthesia or attending an ultrasound/cadaver/anatomy workshop.

G. McLeod
Dundee, UK
E-mail: g.a.mcleod@dundee.ac.uk
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This is the second edition of a book first published in 1995. With more than 30 authors contributing to 16 chapters in 450 pages, the editors have to be congratulated on maintaining a uniformity of style. It is a compact pocket-sized book which covers a variety of topics and as its title suggests is very much orientated towards the North American reader. A large proportion of this book is devoted to subjects that are not immediately relevant to the British or European reader. These include ‘office-based anaesthesia’, quality management, regulation and accreditation, profitability, efficiency, and cost containment and administrative aspects. Nonetheless, buried within these are one or two gems of information and they provide a stimulus for thought for those involved in the development and running of a day surgery unit.

The clinically based subjects in this book cover most aspects of adult and paediatric anaesthesia, although the slant towards North American clinical practice is well demonstrated with the emphasis on tracheal intubation for airway management while acknowledging the place of the laryngeal mask airway. The information is concise with many very useful summary tables and up-to-date key references. There are a number of subjects which are particularly well presented. Pre-anaesthetic evaluation and testing is set out in a refreshingly clear fashion with a good explanation behind the thinking in ordering a range of common laboratory investigations. It is as much about