Book reviews

Epilepsy and Dementia in Older People: Does the Diagnosis Fit? A Review of the Medical Literature

Edited by Ashley Cochrane

There are over 11 million elderly people in the United Kingdom, at least 1% of whom have epilepsy and 5–20% of whom have dementia. These figures suggest that the overlap between the two conditions is considerable, but as the author states at the beginning of this book, there is a dearth of literature on older patients with both. This review of current literature on epilepsy and dementia is therefore a much-needed publication.

This paperback is divided into 19 short chapters, the evidence base for which is contained in the comprehensive list of references. The first chapters concern the classifications of epilepsy, dementia and memory, which are succinctly discussed, as are the diagnosis and investigation of epilepsy and the overlap between epilepsy and dementia. There is useful material on amnesic states, the presentation of which can pose a difficult diagnostic dilemma for clinicians. Issues including driving and the psychological impact of seizures later in life are also considered. Less comprehensive, however, is the review of treatment, particularly with regard to the newer antiepileptic drugs. A discussion on therapies for dementia would have served to enhance this section of the book. The final chapters provide information on government policies and services for senior citizens with the diagnoses, including contact details for support groups.

Apart from some spelling and grammatical errors, this publication is easy to read and is an informative reference tool. It will fill an important knowledge gap for medical, nursing and paramedical staff, working to ease the hardships of elderly people with dementia and epilepsy.

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Dementia. 3rd Edition

Edited by Alistair Burns, John O’Brien and David Ames

The second edition of this book, published just 5 years ago, was described as the ‘gold standard’ work on dementia and as ‘the only reference required’. Certainly my own copy is dog-eared from use, but would this new edition justify me parting with another £145? Fortunately, the opportunity to review the book made the decision for me.

As before, the authors of the 65 chapters come from six continents and are international authorities in their fields. The editors remain the same but have been shuffled into a different order. The book covers the whole spectrum of dementia, with the first one-third addressing general aspects of assessment and care, followed by comprehensive sections on Alzheimer’s disease, cerebrovascular disease, dementia with Lewy bodies, focal dementias and dementia and neuropsychiatric disorders. What is new in this edition? Well, there is now a whole section on mild cognitive impairment, including a historical perspective, clinical characterisation and treatment, and there are useful new chapters on prevention of Alzheimer’s disease, trial design, quality of life, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, the cerebellum and cognitive impairment and dementia in Parkinson’s disease. There is also a first-hand account of one caregiver’s experience—he suggests that rule number one is to accept that you will never win an argument with someone with Alzheimer’s. Some chapters have just had a few recent references added (up to mid-2004), whereas many have new authors or have been largely rewritten, including those on neuroimaging and epidemiology. The section on dementia services around the world has been revised most extensively and illustrates the dramatically different approaches to meeting the rising tide, from Africa to the former Soviet Union. What is missing? Those with a biomedical perspective of dementia will be hard pressed to spot serious omissions, though the book let me down when I was looking for information on normal pressure hydrocephalus, and there is only a brief mention of promising anti-amyloid approaches to treating Alzheimer’s disease. Those with a psychosocial approach to dementia may feel that the coverage is unbalanced. Personhood is scarcely mentioned. Yet, there cannot be many medical textbooks that allocate space to a colour plate of a washing line at a care home in Germany.

Would I buy this new edition? Yes, certainly. It is an essential reference for every geriatric, neurology and old-age psychiatry departmental library, and any individual clinicians and researchers with an interest in dementia will want to have their own personal copy. A ‘platinum standard’ has arrived.

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