
The Heath Clark Lectures for 1961, delivered by A. V. Neale in the University of London, are here published in book form. In reading these pages one can learn much of their writer, a man devoted to the welfare of children: patient, painstaking, erudite, and clear-thinking. The chapters contain a wealth of information on medical practice, public attitudes, and litigation regarding health and disease, especially of children, throughout the ages and over the world. The first chapter reviews in general terms the advances of thought on the education and medical care of children. The second chapter deals with human reproduction, and the importance of maternal health and care in relation to the welfare of the foetus and infant. In the following chapters Neale illustrates the ways in which advances have been made by reference to epidemiology, especially in relation to tuberculosis and juvenile rheumatism, and the final chapter surveys the interrelation of the many aspects of child health. Throughout the book there is evidence of much patient research, with valuable statistical tables and references to the many men whose teaching and writing have influenced the progress of humanity. There is an extensive bibliography. The writing is simple, direct, and non-technical, and the book can be read with profit and pleasure by all those, medical and lay, who are interested in the welfare of children, and of humanity as a whole.


Here is a constructive contribution to the treatment of cerebral palsy. In a child with cerebral palsy there exists a dynamic situation in which the abnormalities of muscle function can lead to the development of deformities and disabilities, and great care is needed in interpreting the significance of what is taking place.

In this book, the result of work carried out at the Ryegate Cerebral Palsy Centre, Sheffield, Dr. Holt suggests ways of observing and assessing the many factors that contribute to the total disabilities of cerebral palsy. It has a practical approach which should prove useful to specialists and therapists.

The assessments of muscle function are helpful to the understanding of the peculiar difficulties experienced in cerebral palsy in initiating and maintaining muscle contraction. While those on the range of joint movements contribute useful information as to how much any deformity may be responsible for disability, therefore what functional benefit can be expected from treatment, especially surgical.

The failure to appreciate the importance of this issue in the past has accounted for many disappointments in treatment which produced a good anatomical result without any improvement of function, and sometimes an actual deterioration, whereas probably the most rewarding result of physiotherapy comes from the anticipation and prevention of deformities which are likely to develop. The results in both instances depend upon adequate assessments to determine the right course of action at the optimum time. These sections are particularly well illustrated with clear informative pictures, as are also the assessments of arm and hand action.

Some of the assessments of posture and balance tend to be a little finicky and in carrying them out a few enthusiasts may lose sight of the child involved. Dr. Holt, however, never loses sight of the whole child, and stresses the importance of critical discussion at every opportunity between all the therapists and doctors concerned, for the most senior person present has only one pair of eyes, and judgement improves immensely as a result of frequent free comment and discussion. It is to be hoped that the publication of this book will likewise help all those concerned with the assessment of cerebral palsy.


This admirable monograph is concerned with the syndrome—known by many names—of infantile spasms with mental subnormality and often a characteristic electroencephalographic abnormality. The book begins with a review of the literature, which is particularly valuable since many of the key papers are in foreign languages. The landmarks include Dr. W. J. West’s account of his own son’s ‘salaam spasms’ in 1841, the description of the EEG by Vazquez and Turner in 1951 and the results of corticotrophin treatment published by Sorel in 1958. The authors then review their own series of 112 cases followed for periods of up to 9 years. They distinguish clearly between symptomatic cases with a known underlying metabolic or cerebral abnormality, and cryptogenic cases where the prognosis is slightly better. In 16 infants the first spasm occurred within one week of pertussis immunization and though a causal relation is hard to establish with certainty it seems disturbingly likely that in some instances this tragic condition is iatrogenic.

The authors analyse in detail their extensive experience of steroid treatment. Though in most cases, particularly in the cryptogenic group, the spasms can quickly be stopped, there is little evidence of any improvement in subsequent mental development. The possible exceptions are some instances where steroid treatment was begun very soon after the onset of spasms. This emphasizes the need for early recognition of a condition where at present there is often delay in diagnosis. This monograph should help to spread knowledge and awareness of infantile spasms. It is exceptionally lucid and readable, sufficiently detailed to be of value to specialists in neurology or epilepsy, and at the same time readily comprehensible (even in the sections on electroencephalography) to any doctor concerned with infant care. It easily ranks with the best of the very good Little Club publications.