
What does a reviewer do when asked to deal with a book of 1363 pages in double columns? Its size declares it to be a work of reference, and this function it carries out admirably. It is worth having for the bibliography alone, which is the best your reviewer has seen on this topic. Like any book with many authors it is better in parts. The correlation of physiological and radiological data with the morbid anatomical is, as one expects with Lev as an editor, very well done. There are some interesting contrasts; for example, the chapter on history and physical examination has one reference, while that on electrocardiography has 120, and this is followed by another chapter on the arrhythmias with a further 256 references. It is sometimes hard to find just who wrote what, and chapters 49 and 50 seem repetitive and out of place. These are very minor criticisms of a book that should be in the library of all departments dealing with this subject.


This book is a detailed report of a comprehensive symposium on spina bifida held in London in June 1965, under the auspices of the National Fund for Research into Poliomyelitis and Other Crippling Diseases. The subject is covered from the physiology and neuropathology of the lesions to all the aspects of surgical management including the treatment of the genitourinary and orthopaedic complications. Each section has a contribution by a major authority on the subject followed by a discussion from other authorities. The contribution to the physiology and neuro-pathology of the lesions by Claireaux adds little to the work of Cameron and Professor Russell on this subject and, as Emery points out in the discussion, it is in the embryological development of these lesions that further research is required. The various hypotheses of the cause of the hydrocephalus associated with these lesions are stimulatingly discussed and here again more knowledge is required. The sections on the epidemiology and genetics of spina bifida by Smithells and Carter respectively are good and provide the sort of data upon which advice to the relatives of children with these conditions can be based. On the surgical side, the case for immediate repair of the spina bifida soon after birth is very well put on general surgical grounds by Zachary and is discussed by Ingram. It is clear that the earlier claim by Sharrard and others from Sheffield that immediate closure of the lesion produces improvement in muscle function of the legs is not being substantiated by other observers, and the rather variable amount of muscle function that is under lower motor neurone control only in these infants has confused the issue. The preservation of the complicated mixture of neurological deficit which these infants show at birth can be preserved both by early surgery, and careful nursing without surgery, and the former should be advocated on general principles alone. It was clearly brought out in this discussion that the increased survival of infants, including a large proportion with various neurological and other disabilities, consequent on early closure, would have to be faced by quite a large degree of medical, surgical, and social welfare specialists in any area. Perhaps the only real point at issue was whether detailed neurological assessment and special investigations during the neonatal period would define more clearly cases that should not be accepted for surgery.

Neurological and paediatric surgeons have now considerable experience of the management of hydrocephalus in infancy and childhood. The contribution by MacNab and the discussions by Eckstein and Forrest and Guthkelch reflect the active surgical approach with the use of the ventriculo-atrial shunts, an approach that is undaunted by the manifold complications of the procedure and is encouraged by the reasonable outlook for these infants in terms of mental function when the hydrocephalus has been arrested. The sections on the orthopaedic management of infants with spina bifida include many contributions which add points of considerable practical importance. Outstanding among these is the contribution by Sharrard with his vast experience on this subject, and though many would consider that the mixture of neurological lesions contributing to the lower limb deformities are determined as much by the neuro-pathology at birth of any particular lesion as by the time of surgical closure, nevertheless the authoritative account of the place of the various surgical corrective procedures is welcome. The likelihood that early surgery will produce more infants with severe paraplegia requiring orthopaedic management makes the contributions by Roaf and Strach particularly welcome. In the section on urological complications, the various forms of urinary diversion are discussed, but perhaps the most interesting contribution is that from Innes Williams, who makes a case for active conservative management of the bladder in order to enhance reflex emptying and to prevent bladder neck obstruction; for it is possible that as a result of earlier closure many of these infants may retain the kind of bladder function that is preserved in the adult paraplegic after cord transection. The final sections deal with the general emotional and social aspects of the care of these children, and here the voices of the paediatricians who have probably the most realistic grasp of the total welfare of these children and its relation to the family and social services are best heard, though throughout this book their quiet contributions to the discussions of surgical enthusiasts make welcome reading.