Book Reviews

Managing Low Back Pain
W.H. Kirkaldy-Willis, C.V. Burton
Third edition
Churchill Livingstone, New York, 1992
Hardcover, 419 pages, $102.00

The third edition of Managing Low Back Pain is an interdisciplinary text written to benefit those who are involved in the treatment of low back pain. With the exception of a few different contributors there are very few changes in the third edition compared to the second edition. The goals of the text include aiming for "Health through Activity" and emphasis is placed on the importance of cooperation between professions in the prevention and treatment of low back pain. Consistent with this interdisciplinary approach, contributors to the text include physicians, orthopaedic surgeons, chiropractors, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and psychiatrists.

The text has 25 chapters arranged into four sections. The first section introduces the reader to some basic principles to the study of low back pain. The first chapter outlines the socio-economic impact, epidemiology and risk factors, while the remaining four chapters deal with anatomy, biomechanics, biochemistry of the intervertebral disc, and pathology and pathogenesis of low back pain.

The second section deals with the clinical picture. The chapter topics in this section are the psychological factors in back pain, the three phases of degenerative disease, the site and nature of the lesion, diagnostic and therapeutic techniques, lumbar spinal imaging, making a specific diagnosis, and differential diagnosis. The introduction deals with the recognition of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of each individual low back pain patient.

The third section of the text discusses the many different approaches to the treatment of low back pain and the benefit that each may offer the patient, as well as the importance of the interaction of professionals in the treatment of the patient.

Chapter 16 outlines the role of manipulation for low back pain. The chapter describes how manipulation works, the effects on the joint, the stages and techniques of manipulation, and the therapeutic effect of manipulation on various lesions. The indications and contraindications for manipulation are briefly covered and a review of the clinical trials of manipulation is presented.

The final section has two chapters outlining the past, present and future of the fields of neurosurgery and orthopaedics on the evaluation and management of low back pain.

In this text Kirkaldy-Willis is successful in addressing the importance of the many aspects of the patient with low back pain. The text covers many of the aspects of low back pain, from anatomy and epidemiology to diagnostic skills and interdisciplinary management of the patient. However, the lack of references in some areas of the text including the three phases of degenerative disease and back school is of some concern. Students covering this material should be directed to primary literature. Another concern regards the chapters on imaging techniques. Although one of the chapters begins with the statement that "imaging of the lumbar spine has undergone changes over the last five years" it does not appear to be different than the 1988 second edition.

Given the above considerations the third edition of this text does not replace the second edition of the text. However the third edition of Managing Low Back Pain by W.H. Kirkaldy-Willis is a recommended addition to the library of those health care professionals and students involved in the management of low back pain that do not have the prior edition. This text is fairly comprehensive in its discussion of low back pain as well as the many management options available.

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How to Survive Your Computer Work Station
Julia S. Lacey with Tom Dickson, DC and
Howard Levinson, OD
CRT Services Inc. Publishers, 1990, revised and updated 1994
P.O. Box 1525, Kirkville, Texas 78029
208 pages, ISBN 09623-656-01

To quote Sir Francis Bacon, "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested ... read wholly, and with diligence and attention". The quote describes the essence of Julia Lacey's 208 page book, "How to Survive Your Computer Workstation". This small, intelligently worded, well indexed and organized paperback is an excellent guide to preventing and solving health problems resulting from long hours spent at a computer workstation. With the assistance of both a chiropractor and an optometrist, the author weaves together a holistic, rational approach to the various conditions which plague computer workers, from neck and back pain to eyestrain and stress.

The organization of the book is straightforward and effective. The book is divided into three main sections (followed by an impressive resource section), each of which covers topics relevant to the health, comfort and wellbeing of the computer operator. Section I deals with the physical arrangement of the work area and health problems related to poor design; section II with visual problems experienced by the operator; and section II with stress. Each section outlines the elements of the workstation design and how that relates to health problems, followed by a discussion of specific problems and their solutions. Emphasis is placed on the importance of optimal posture, the reduction of monitor glare, and the positive value of exercise.

Of particular value is the accessibility and cost-effectiveness of Julia Lacey's suggestions. The mainstay of her approach consists of simple, yet often overlooked solutions such as adjusting the chair, changing the height of the monitor, repositioning the keyboard, performing discrete exercises and taking short frequent breaks. Helpful forms for workers to use in evaluating their workstations may be found at the end of every section. For example, there is a chair evaluation form to be used for either selecting a new chair, or evaluating a currently used one.

The resource section contains information on products and services, a listing of periodicals and books relevant to the computer operator, the names of two consultants, and an appendix describing the major points of a retrospective study of WCB cases involving double crush/carpal tunnel syndrome. This section is both exhaustive and up to date.

I have only one negative point to make regarding this otherwise

superb guide. It concerns the proofreading of the text. Although the book is accompanied by a listing of errata, several typographical errors escaped scrutiny.

Altogether, this practical computer workstation survival guide, with its easy to implement solutions and suggestions is highly recommended for everyone who is plagued by discomfort and decreased productivity at work due to the poor ergonomics of their computer work area, as well as for chiropractors and other health care professionals who deal with problems of the nature discussed in "How to Survive Your Computer Workstation". Truly, this book is more than just a few good bytes!

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How We Die
Sherwin B. Nuland
Alfred A. Knopf, New York and
Random House of Canada, Toronto, 1994
$Can 31.50, ISBN 0-679-41461-4

In Richard Lederer's engrossing book, The Miracle of Language (Pocket Books, New York, 1992), we learn that English "has become the most widely spoken language in the history of humankind". (Chinese is not judged a single language because its five distinct dialects are mutually unintelligible in spoken forms). The Academie Française states, 2,796 languages exist in the world; what sets English apart from other languages is its huge, diverse vocabulary. Webster's International Dictionary includes 450,000 words while the Oxford English Dictionary presents 615,000 words. Lederer compares these numbers to traditional estimates of 185,000 words in the German vocabulary, 130,000 in the Russian and approximately 100,000 in the French language. What is this enumeration leading to?

It is serving as the introduction to another engrossing book, Sherwin B. Nuland's How We Die. Dr. Nuland is a surgeon who also teaches medical history at Yale University. One of the main reasons this book is so thoroughly readable is Nuland's use of the English language. It is as much a tool for him as the hockey stick is for Wayne Gretzky and the golf stick for Nick Price. Here is an example of one of his well-composed sentences, this one regarding drugs for cardiac ischemia:

> There are drugs to decrease myocardial irritability, prevent spasm, dilate coronary arteries, strengthen the heartbeat, diminish accelerations of rate, drive out the excess load of water and salt in congestive failure, slow down the clotting process, decrease cholesterol levels in the blood, low blood pressure, allay anxiety – and every one of them carries with it the possibility of undesirable or frankly dangerous side effects for whose treatment, of course, there are still other drugs.

Nuland's brief sentences are no less evocative:

> Angina pectoris is nothing less than a charley horse of the heart.

or

> A cluster of malignant cells is a disorganized autonomous mob of maladjusted adolescents.

The Globe and Mail bestseller list limns How We Die succinctly: "Sherman B. Nuland offers a portrait on the experience of dying." That experience differs individually as much as our lives differ. The author discusses death from diverse causes: ischemic heart disease, stroke, Alzheimer's disease, murder, accidents, suicide, euthanasia (approximately 2,300 indiviuduals undergo legal voluntary death per year in the Netherlands), AIDS and cancer.

Nuland's forbears immigrated to America from eastern Europe and because his grandmother did not speak English she was called the Yiddish equivalent, Bubbeh. A moving chapter describes Bubbeh's life – and eventual death – in their Manhattan tenement house, her passing being due to nothing more destructive than the senescence that befalls the aged of all species. He resents the governmental regulation which makes it illegal to list the cause of death as Old Age on official forms when that, in fact, is so often the cause of death. "Whatever scientific diagnoses I have been scribbling on my state's death certificate to satisfy the Bureau of Vital Statistics, I know better." Of the hundreds of known diseases, 85% of the aging populace will fall victim to one or more of these seven entities: atherosclerosis, hypertension, adult onset diabetes, obesity, Alzheimer's and other dementias, cancer, and lessened resistance to infection.

Nuland's 280 page dissertation includes wide-ranging commentary. He does not accept the premise that research will lead to humankind spanning Methuselah-like frontiers. He believes old age to be "as insolvable as it is inevitable". The two theories which explain aging can be termed the wear-and-tear hypothesis and the genetic predetermination postulation. Nuland sees validity in both propositions as well as in other factors. Dr. Leonard Hayflick experimented with fibroblasts, our basic tissue framework cells, nearly 30 years ago. He found that laboratory fibroblasts divided actively through many generations, gradually slowing and reaching a maximum finite limit of approximately 50 cell divisions. Hayflick's work is put forward in support of characteristic life spans for each species.

For human beings, the maximum does appear to be between 100 and 110 years; average life expectancy has increased markedly but maximum human age has remained stable through history. Dr. Nuland says this is as it should be, that "each new generation yearns to prove itself and to do its best for the world. There is renewal and rediscovery – with foreknowledge – in the approach of youth. Those who want to live forever bring a demeaning vanity to nature while the opposite case of accepting life's limits provides a symmetry and framework to our lives.

This book is fascinating and enlightening, yielding worthy reading for the well-rounded chiropractic practitioner. One could recommend that it be perused slowly in the manner of enjoying a fine port. They would in fact, make fine companions over several evenings consumption.

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