

101 years of a new kind of rays

By: Peh WCG

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Dr Peh's book is a definitive work on the history of medical imaging, and the book makes suitable reading for radiologists, radiographers, medical physicists, and non-radiological medical doctors as well as for laymen who are interested in the different facets of medical history. Thumbing through the pages, one begins to realise how much time and effort Dr Peh has given to this work in order to generate the kind of details included in the book.

The first chapters of the book deal with X-ray alone. It begins with a detailed, geographic, and academic, chronology of the discoverer of X-rays, Dr Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen. It also goes into the controversy of who discovered X-rays. The author undertook a trip to Lennep (where Röntgen was born) and to Würzburg (where Röntgen performed his monumental work), and the author gives a detailed description of both places.

This is followed by a description of different major innovations, including collimation device, the invention of the Bucky Diaphragm, rotating anodes, tomogram, and image intensifier—all of which enhance radiological diagnosis. An integrated discussion of the invention of oral, intravenous, intrathecal, and intra-arterial contrast agents is also provided, along with a brief mention of the Seldinger technique as a forerunner of interventional radiology.

Later chapters describe the history of medical ultrasound, computed tomography (CT) and magnetic

resonance (MR) scanning, as well as nuclear medicine. The development of a related discipline, radiotherapy, then follows. The book ends with mention of the radiological training programmes in different parts of the world.

Medical history can be dry, but Dr Peh is cognizant of this fact and he has taken pains to inject a proper dose of entertainment from time to time. For example, Dr George Charles de Hevesy, Nobel Laureate, father of Nuclear Medicine “managed to confirm his suspicions that his landlady was recycling his leftover food. He spiked the leftover food on his plate with a radioactive substance and later detected the radioactivity in his next recooked meal by means of a gold-leaf electroscope.”

If one accepts the fact that no work is perfect, then imperfection perhaps can be linked to the history of CT and MR, which is presented rather briefly, even though the merits of CT and MR now far outweigh the importance of X-ray in clinical practice. This minor issue, however, cannot mask the fact that it is a work well done.

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Practical HRT

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“Practical HRT” reminds me a lot of “Aids to MRCOG.” The writing style is austere and approach to presentation is straight out of desktop publishing. However, it is not difficult to read for anyone reasonably familiar with the subject matter. The only relief

from the relentless onslaught of tightly packaged information and recommendations are the flow charts, tables, and occasional black and white diagram. The aim appears to have been to cram in as much information as possible into a relatively small book.