

Neurosurgical management of pain

Ed: North RB, Levy RM

Springer-Verlag Singapore Pte Ltd., #04-01 Cencon I, 1 Tannery Road, Singapore 347719
HK\$1081, pp 360, ISBN 0 387 94256 4

Neurosurgical Management of Pain covers most topics about chronic pain management. While very suitable for casual reading, it contains plenty of valuable information, including that about surgical techniques. The book starts with 10 chapters about pain physiology and clinical presentation, which are followed by six chapters on ablative procedures and eight chapters on augmentative procedures. Most chapters have been written by experts in each of the respective fields.

Pain management has been an unpopular, if not neglected, subject among neurosurgeons in Hong Kong. As the editors rightly point out, neurosurgeons are uniquely qualified to provide a range of interventional

treatments and diagnostic procedures for persistent or chronic pain. I believe neurosurgeons in Hong Kong should engage themselves more in pain management. There are only a few good monographs dealing with the neurosurgical treatment of pain—this book is one of them and provides neurosurgeons with a good foundation in pain management.

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An evidence-based resource for pain relief

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Oxford University Press, 18/F Warwick House East, Taikoo Place, 979 King's Road, Quarry Bay, Hong Kong
HK\$1020, pp 272, ISBN 0 19 262718 X

The timely publication of *An Evidence-Based Resource for Pain Relief* adds to the momentum of the popular notion that the practice of medicine should be based on evidence. Nobody argues against the idea that treatment should be decided by scientific information. Yet, the numerous variables involved in a clinical situation often make the outcome difficult to assess. This problem is especially true in pain relief, which entails subjective reporting. The most valuable information provided by the book, however, is how to examine the evidence about pain relief.

The authors state at the beginning of the book that the aim is to assess evidence to determine the best analgesic in a particular context. This goal is indeed what every medical practitioner would like to know. The authors' comments at the end of each chapter are particularly useful, because they provide information about which therapies are most likely to be effective.

The book has three parts: on methodology, acute pain, and chronic pain. The section on methodology reviews randomised controlled trials. Analgesic efficacy is used as the yardstick, which is expressed as the number needed to treat—that is, the number of patients who need to receive the active drug to achieve 50% pain relief when compared with effects of a placebo. In the section on acute pain, 15 chapters provide detailed information regarding how drugs are different from placebos and from each other in various situations; the comments are an invaluable guide. The section on chronic pain is a literature review, although limited to some small studies; relative performances of the study interventions are ranked by indirect means. The methods evaluated are analgesics, nerve blocks, and alternative techniques such as acupuncture and transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation. The conclusions outline which interventions are not effective (eg varying fractionation schedules of radiotherapy for bone pain, or relief of chronic pain by transcutaneous electrical