BOOK REVIEW

Jamieson's First Notebook of Head Injury. Third edition
By Brian North

The Practical Management of Head Injuries. Fourth edition
By John Potter & Michael Briggs
100 pp. £5.00.

These two books have much in common. They are short, clear expositions of a difficult problem which is often in part the responsibility of young doctors at an early stage of their career. The centre of the problem faced by both books is how to spot among the many improving head injuries that occasional deteriorating case whose life may depend on a rapid decision to operate and evacuate a haematoma.

Both books have survived for 20 years or more, and no book lasts that long unless it successfully meets a genuine need. While the object and efficiency of the books may be similar, the style is widely different. Potter's book (or Michael Briggs) is a straightforward and serious approach which systematically builds up a complete picture. You will seek in vain for a good laugh. Jamieson’s book (or Brian North’s), is full of question and answer, or caricature and most memorable doggerel. When buying a book, I myself rate this ability to communicate with some ebullience very highly, and on that score I would have to go for Jamieson/North. However on the crucial questions like ‘Should I admit’, ‘Should we operate?’ and ‘Should we X-ray?’ I found it easier to find direct answers in Potter/Briggs.

However, although much can be said in favour of both books, they are both based on what has recently become an outdated philosophy; this is that in most cases one is forced to wait and carry out serial observations until various classical signs of deterioration awaken one to the need of CAT Scan and/or operation. A group of neurosurgeons published an article in the British Medical Journal in March 1984 challenging this view. They suggest that by spotting high-risk cases, it is frequently possible by CAT Scans to make the diagnosis before deterioration takes place.

The new approach does not make the old clinical skills unnecessary but they set a framework within which these skills must be practised. No doubt, this will be explained in the next editions. Until then I think you should get a copy of the article by the neurosurgeons and staple it inside the back cover of your copy.

Which book you buy must be a matter of personal taste. An hour’s reading in the library should settle the matter.

REFERENCE


W. H. Rutherford
Consultant Surgeon
Accident and Emergency Department,
Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast,
Northern Ireland