



In Spinal Cord this month . . .

I am most grateful to the diligence, interest and cooperation of Dr Exner, Professor Gerner and Professor Meinecke. Due to their efforts we have for the first time, after rather a long gestation period, a German Regional Issue of Spinal Cord.

In their Editorial, they provide an outline, some background information and comments on the development of the journal and of the International Medical Society of Paraplegia. Both are filling a gap in the rapidly expanding medical field of the basic science and clinical aspects of the spinal cord and the development, disease and traumatic pathologies.

There is a wide choice of topics in the articles provided in this special issue of the journal.

Trends in the investigation and management of SCI patients in Germany

A clear outline, including important statistics are provided in the two articles by Meinecke and Exner (p. 411) in which are set out the development of the special care of people with traumatic or non-traumatic spinal cord lesions. Indeed the survey extends back over 20 years and goes on not only to give an up-to-date survey of the current care of such individuals but also sets out plans for future developments in Germany. The prospects look good.

The surgical treatment of acute spinal paralysed patients

Botel *et al* (p. 420) give a straight forward account of the several problems and decisions necessary and indeed also the facilities and personnel required for the modern care of spinal paralysed people. As would be expected, they are dealing with a controversial therapeutic situation, where there are few reliable statistics with no matched patient controlled studies. They are quite definite in their proposals and it is interesting that they conclude their article by referring back to Ludwig Guttmann.

Orthopaedic surgical approach for malignant spinal neoplasia

In their article, Kluger *et al* (p. 429) illustrate how they have taken up the somewhat daunting challenge of the treatment of patients with malignant disease of the spine. They have produced an interesting 'tumour algorithm of therapy' and report its use over a 5 year period.

The treatment of complicated pressure sores:

A clear indication for the use of a pedicled vastus lateralis musculocutaneous flap for pelvic region pressure ulcers is given by Schmidt *et al* (p. 437). Their results are most impressive.

Heterotopic ossification of the hip:

A radical approach to this serious complication of hip heterotopic ossification which occurs in some spinal paralysed patients is practised by Meiners *et al* (p. 443) with good results. The surgical operation is followed by a course of high energy radiation from a linear accelerator, and expert physiotherapy.

Chronic intractable pain following a spinal cord injury:

Such pain and dysaesthesiae are quite common after a spinal cord injury experienced by more than 60% of the patients studied most carefully and reported on in the article by Stormer *et al* (p. 446). The authors take up the challenge in their analysis of their patients pains and include details of the importance of the psychological and social aspects of them. They conclude their paper by recommending further research on therapy for patients with post SCI pain.

Bladder autoaugmentation:

Stohrer *et al* (p. 456) make out a good case for the operative procedure of urinary bladder autoaugmentation for selected patients with a neuropathic, low capacity high pressure bladder.

Semen retrieval in spinal cord injured patients

Major advances are being made in several aspects of sexuality of those who are spinal paralysed and Lochner-Ernst *et al* (p. 463) provide an excellent example of this when describing their experiences with both conservative and surgical retrieval of semen in several patients and indeed with 73 resulting pregnancies.

Regeneration of lesioned corticospinal tract fibres:

Most fortunately ingenious, important annual research studies are continuing in the attempt to produce spinal cord regeneration and the beautiful work of Schwab and Brosalme (p. 469) illustrates some of the problems that exist, and now provide knowledge of several aspects that are being undertaken in experimental neurobiology including neurotrophic factors and neurite growth inhibitors. Hopefully, these fundamental researches will eventually lead to practical therapies in man.

Cellular alteration of axotomised neurons following spinal cord injury:

Further insight into some of the complex aspects of the neurobiological changes which accompany a spinal cord injury is supplied in the elegant work by Brook *et al* (p. 474) published in this journal. Their animal



researches are set out clearly in their paper in which they conclude that the monoclonal antibody Py appears to be a useful marker for the study of the mechanisms involved in the cellular alterations of axotomised neurons following spinal cord injury.

Special Note:

The three sub-editors of the German Regional Issue obtained two further articles which will be published in

the August 1997 issue of Spinal Cord as there was insufficient space in this issue. These are by Berghammer *et al* and Strubreither *et al*.

Phillip Harris
Editor