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Book Review

Kleihues P, Cavanee WK, editors: Pathology and Genetics of Tumours of the Nervous System, 314 pp, Lyon, France, IARC Press 2000 (\$75.00).

It is axiomatic that pathologists must avoid the ambiguity of “mixing apples and oranges” as they acquire and convey information through tissue examination. This obligation requires accurate recognition and classification of specific disease entities, followed by the unequivocal transmission of data, using universally accepted terminology.

This responsibility was underscored when, in the mid-portion of the past century, the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, acting under the auspices of the National Research Council, initiated publication of the series “Atlases of Tumor Pathology.” With a similar objective, the Executive Board of the World Health Organization established world-wide centers for the formation of universal tumor classifications. Thereby, through the collaborative efforts of neuropathologists from 14 countries, the WHO published a text titled “Histological Typing of Tumours of the Central Nervous System,” dated 1979. In accord with the scope of responsibility of pathologists during that era, this manual was predominantly pictorial, supplemented by a set of illustrative transparencies. It was updated in 1993 by Drs. Kleihues, Burger, and Scheitauer.

But recent technologic advances have significantly expanded the responsibilities of pathologists, for it is now clear that the character of most neoplastic transformations in the nervous system are reflective of varied, but individualizing, genetic dysregulations. The pathologist, through access to cytogenetic techniques, becomes an essential collaborator in the identification of potential targets for future therapy. Accordingly,

the WHO has initiated a new series of texts titled “Pathology and Genetics.” Each volume will encompass lesions of a major organ system. The initial volume concerns neoplasms of the nervous system; the second, the digestive tract. The entire series is scheduled for completion during the next 3 years.

This review pertains to the volume titled “Pathology and Genetics,” with the subtitle “Tumours of the Nervous System.” Its 314 pages catalogue and classify the neoplasms in an orderly sequence. Their diagnostic morphologies are disclosed magnificently in a generous number of color illustrations. The explanatory text is multiauthored by international contributors, varied for each entity. Its text is generous but explicit. Informational access is facilitated by subheadings that bring together facts that specifically relate to the clinical, radiographic, molecular, genetic, morphologic, and prognostic features of each lesion. This WHO series should occupy an arms-reach position in the office of every pathologist, neuro-oncologist, neurosurgeon, neuroradiologist, and geneticist.

Regrettably, informational exchange in medicine is rarely philanthropic. Granted, “there is no free lunch”; however, the production of this series by the WHO, as well as those by the AFIP, was prompted by humanitarian objectives. Consequently, they provide full course banquets at lunch counter prices. Moreover, to members of the International Academy of Pathology, worldwide, the WHO series is now offered at a 30% discount—little more than a cup of coffee, a steak sandwich, and the conventional tip.

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