

Book Review

Spinal Cord (2004) 42, 723. doi:10.1038/sj.sc.3101608

History of the Treatment of Spinal Injuries

John Russell Silver

Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, Dordrecht

ISBN: 0 306 48032 8, 297 pp Price: £76.00

This book, introduced by Sir Roger Bannister, is based on an MD thesis for the University of London. This publication is aimed at giving a medical history of the care of the victims of spinal cord injuries mainly concentrating on 19th and 20th centuries. The author relates in detail the historical events in the United Kingdom, including Sir Ludwig Guttmann's personal and professional odyssey and his outstanding merits, followed by the history of the National Spinal Injuries Centre at Stoke Mandeville Hospital. In this chapter, he gives also his professional experiences. These chapters are followed by the related medical history: in the United States (particularly the outstanding pioneering work of D Munro), Canada, the German-speaking world and France.

This book can be considered mainly as a historical reference work and fulfills the need of people interested particularly in the history of this subject in the early 20th century. Personally, as a Frenchman, I was perhaps not quite satisfied by the too rapid recognition concerning the excellent scientific anatomical (his description of the sacral dermatomes is still valid these days) as well as the pathological approach of the spinal cord by Professor and Mrs Dejerine-Klumke, published in this journal.¹

The fact that this lady ran the first military specialized spinal cord unit during the First World War must be underlined. There is little mention of the investigations carried out by André-Thomas on the autonomic nervous system disturbances in spinal cord injuries, notwithstanding that the term *syringomyelia* was coined by Olivier d'Angers in 1827.

I liked the historical quality of the conclusions of this book. The bibliography could perhaps have been more extensive. It will certainly interest medical specialists, allied professionals, interested people at large, concerned with the care and rehabilitation of the victims of a spinal cord lesion, which, still in living memory, was doomed to be dreadful and lethal.

The quality of production overall is satisfactory, the hard cover is well bound. One could make some remarks about the quality of some of the photographic illustrations. I would recommend this work, which has the merit of filling a badly needed historical gap for most of us.

P Dollfus

References

- 1 Schurch B, Dollfus P. The 'Dejerines': a historical review and homage to two pioneers in the field of neurology and their contribution to the understanding of spinal cord pathology. *Spinal Cord* 1998; 36: 78–86.