



Book Review

The Spine and Medical Negligence

RW Porter

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Professor Porter, a Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon, states that spinal surgery is an important aspect of alleged medical negligence, and this is illustrated in a clear, practical way by him, bringing out many relevant facts and providing a number of actual Case Reports.

Litigation from alleged negligence is certainly on the increase, and is very worrying. Proper, up-to-date education and expert training of the medical and allied health staff are essential. The author quotes an article by Okafor and Sullivan (*Eur. Spine* 1997, 6: 294–297), where, in the United Kingdom there was found to be insufficient training for surgeons with an interest in spinal disorders: 24% did not regularly carry out spinal decompressions, 60% did not perform posterior fusions, 77% did not do anterior fusions, and spinal deformity was not dealt with by 90%. Some spinal procedures could be carried out by inexperienced surgeons, unless the choice of surgery is highly selective; technical misadventures can occur – but should not, during certain spinal operations.

Nowadays greater attention is being paid in high risk specialities, with increasing and at times demanding workloads, and with greater scrutiny and expectations from the public, the media and from professional bodies. A recently formed organisation is The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (with the interesting acronym: NICE).

Medical Audits are becoming mandatory, for obvious reasons; and another matter taken up by the author, of great importance, is Informed Consent which should be the responsibility of the consultant surgeon, obtaining a voluntary relationship between him/her and the patient.

The scope of this excellent book is shown by some of the chapter headings, including: 'Why do patients sue their surgeons?'; 'The legal process and problems'; 'Informed consent'; 'Positioning the patient'; 'Cauda equina syndrome'; 'Damage to dura'; 'Spinal infections'; 'Uncontrolled haemorrhage'; 'Spinal stenosis'; 'Fractures of the spine'; 'Spinal tumours'; 'Scoliosis'; 'Negligent medical reports'; and 'Risk management'.

The author is educative, discussing important aspects of several spinal conditions. 'The things that can go wrong' can be somewhat frightening, thus, for example one important scientific study revealed that two thirds of the claims for wrong side surgery are after orthopaedic procedures! Obviously many lessons are to be learnt, and most hopefully young doctors will not be deterred by possible litigation claims, and will proceed with expert, up-to-date, comprehensive training, to become skilled consultant specialists.

This book, by a distinguished surgeon, is highly recommended, for all medical and allied health personnel involved with the management of patients with spinal disorders. It is well written, the type is clear, there are many useful figures and some excellent up-to-date references, also, it is inexpensive.

Phillip Harris