The Anesthesiologist’s Bookshelf

Edited by Merel H. Harmel


Chapters are contributed by 11 outstanding anesthesiologists, each of whom is well known for his contributions to regional or local anesthesia. The book is well organized, and for the first time the recent advances and current status of regional anesthesia are presented in a concise, lucid manner in a single volume. Of particular significance are the sections on the mechanism of action of local anesthetic agents, the present-day indications for regional anesthesia in surgery, and the therapy and diagnosis of various pain syndromes. Numerous references to the current literature are also included. This book, although it contains little information that has not been presented before in articles in journals or textbooks by the same authors, is a very worthwhile addition to the anesthesiology literature. It is recommended reading for all who perform regional anesthesia procedures and is of particular value to all residents in anesthesiology. This well-written book is certainly well worth the $8.00 which it costs.

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The authors state in the foreword of their text that a symposium on "Anaesthesia for Dental Surgery" in March 1968, British Journal of Anaesthesia, demonstrated a great interest in and need for up-to-date information on work in this field. As a result, many articles appearing in the British Journal were revised to provide a "modern approach to techniques, drugs or concepts in this field."

Aside from the obvious problems resulting from contributions by different authors, many statements which might be applicable to the authors' experience and hospital surroundings but which might be hazardous to apply to others are made. Only a few will be noted. A patient with massive soft tissue damage with the central portion of his mandible blown off by a shot-gun blast is used as one example. It is stated that preliminary tracheostomy "is probably the safest technique for the inexperienced anesthetist to employ." Where no emergency tracheostomy has been performed, the authors favor a "crash induction with or without cricoid pressure." The implication to the reader that an experienced anesthetist need not recommend a tracheostomy prior to induction in this situation is dangerous.

It is suggested in a section on "The Complications of Dental Anaesthesia" that if mouth breathing is a persistent problem and anaesthesia is becoming light, "a small amount of a volatile anaesthetic agent may be placed on the mouth pack. As the patient mouth breathes, he will inhale an anesthetic-laden mixture which will restore nasal respiration." Even though this statement is qualified by discussing the possible hazards of this technique, it would seem unwise to suggest this to a diverse audience. This same author also states that "there is probably no place in the dental surgery for more elaborate methods of overcoming laryngeal spasm, such as the intravenous injection of a muscle relaxant, cricothyroid puncture or emergency tracheostomy." One would hardly consider this a modern approach.

In a section devoted to problems of the haemophiliac patient, a detailed regimen for administering epsilon-aminocaproic acid and cryoglobulin is suggested. Even though a reference is supplied, the use of the former is more commonly reserved only for patients exhibiting fibrinolysis and the more characteristic substances administered are cryoprecipitate or Factor 8 concentrate.

Although there are excellent chapters in this text describing techniques, equipment, and complications of dental anesthesia, and in spite of the fact that it is not intended as a comprehensive survey of the field, there are too many debatable points, errors, and oversimplifications. It is more a matter of how the authors do it than how the readers should.

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This volume incorporates the papers and discussions presented at an international symposium sponsored by the Alfred Benzon Foundation in Copenhagen, Denmark, and Lund, Sweden, in May 1970. During the past decade, it has become generally recognized that control of both respiration and the cerebral circulation is mediated