

Book Review

***The care of neuropathic limbs; a practical manual.* Grace Warren**
Parthenon Publishing Group, ISBN 1-85070-048-6, £45 per copy

This book is the distillation of some 40 years experience in managing neuropathic limbs, mainly in those persons affected by leprosy but also in later years in advice to diabetic and orthopaedic specialists in 'Western countries'. For the new doctor in a leprosy control programme seeing a warm swollen ankle joint and an X-ray with minimal changes of dubious significance this is a really helpful book. It gives a clear if somewhat didactic understanding of the aetiology of the slowly inexorable changes of neuropathic bone disintegration, and helps the confused doctor make a rational plan of what to do to prevent the dreadful consequences, if the condition is not actively managed. Such information would also be of considerable interest to physicians responsible for neuropathic joints in developed nations. Here, the management is often relegated to a junior doctor or outpatient nursing service and unless such people are thinking about neuropathy as a cause of the patient's warm swollen joint, the diagnosis will go unnoticed for months if not years and much deformity will develop before any action is taken to control the problem.

The reader who likes evidence will be disappointed, as Grace provides only one reference in the whole manuscript. She makes strong statements about management mostly based on her considerable experience, even though there is already published data for some of her assertions, which may seem strange to specialists not previously working in this field. However, the absence of evidence will cause some to consider her statements to be beliefs rather than facts, especially regarding the process of inflammation and healing in neuropathic joints. This aside, the text provides an excellent framework in order to assess and treat neuropathic injuries and will be essential for any department regularly dealing with potential patients to help them both spot the diagnosis early and then help them with practical advice on how to actually control the problem. There are excellent chapters on 'the significance of hot spots', 'radiology of the lesions' and 'the development of disintegrating bone lesions'.

Those who know Grace will be able to 'hear' her voice in this book, as the style is rather wordy and repeats itself, but only with the purpose of making the points that those seeing potential people affected with a neuropathic joint might not miss these points.

At £45 it is a good buy, and I recommend it to all who might have occasion to treat these patients. After you have read this book, you will probably be the only person who will have any idea as to what is going on with the individual, and you may need to point out some salient feature to a more senior colleague.

Bruce Richard MS FRCS

Grace Warren's book may also be ordered through TALC, at a basic retail price of £12 for small quantities (approximately A4 page size, flexible laminated cover). Available also from The Leprosy Mission, PO Box 293, Box Hill 3128, Victoria, Australia. For price and postage, fax +61 3 9890 0550 or e-mail treenah@leprosymission.org.au.