Book Review

Syndromes: Rapid Recognition and Perioperative Implications
Bruno Bissonnette

Google without a computer! This easily readable and very useful comprehensive desk reference/compendium of genetic, metabolic, and dysmorphic disorders provides the reader with rapid access to information for over 2,000 conditions. (Cross-referencing with the clinical variants and or synonyms boosts the number covered to some 4,500 named disorders). Some conditions that are not congenital in nature are also included for their interest and clinical relevance.

Current forces in modern medicine dictate that most patients arrive on the day of surgery, and they usually have not had a preoperative assessment by an anesthesiologist. Many may arrive with a “syndrome label” and little additional information. The information available in this book can quickly solve that problem. For the health care providers who manage these patients on a regular or even sporadic basis, this reference book is a “must have.” I believe it will find its way onto the shelves of every anesthesia department and university reference library.

Although aimed at anesthesiologists, this manual could equally serve as a guide for pediatricians or other health care providers involved in the specialized perioperative care of these patients. The information is provided in a standardized template using clinically appropriate headings that include “important features at a glance,” incidence, genetic inheritance, pathophysiology, diagnostic features, clinical features, anesthetic and pharmacologic considerations, and useful references for more detailed reading. Some syndromes closely resemble others and can have synonyms or different names in different parts of the world. All of these are dealt with in a later subsection and also in the index, which helps the reader to identify the particular clinical entity accurately. The synonym subheading is a particularly useful feature principally because as the human genome has been unraveled, many genetic disorders are being renamed and reclassified, and previous nomenclature is changing and is in some cases outdated.

For the anesthesiologist, the sections describing the anesthetic and pharmacologic considerations are particularly useful. This information is usually difficult to find. Armed with the information provided, the anesthesiologist cannot only impress the family, gaining their confidence, but also avoid potential pitfalls and plan an anesthetic accordingly. The impact on the outcome of the anesthesia could be significant and potentially lifesaving. Those who have an interest in regional anesthesia and pain management (i.e., the readers of this journal) would understand this situation because regional anesthesia is often the best option for orthopedic or other surgical procedures in syndromic children (or adults, for that matter), particularly those with airway, cardiorespiratory, or neuromuscular disorders.

The conditions are listed alphabetically in a dictionary-style format using the most common name for each particular syndrome. The need for an index, one would think, would then be superfluous. However, the index adds significant value to the book. The main syndromes are highlighted in bold print, whereas overviews, synonyms, classifications, and links with other related syndromes or conditions are coded with a specific icon to assist the reader in identifying or excluding other disorders more definitively. This must have taken a lot of time and effort, and it certainly enhances the value of the book.

In an uncontrolled unblinded random test, I asked colleagues at 2 pediatric tertiary referral centers, one in the United States and the other in South Africa, to test the scope of the book by providing names of the rarest or most bizarre syndromes they had encountered in their clinical careers. Of the 100 odd syndromes provided, all except Pallister-Killian syndrome (tetrasomy 12p mosaic syndrome), were easily found and relevant information provided. Does this indicate a failure? I doubt it! No reference book can possibly have every condition; a 99% success rate exceeded expectations.

Providing safe anesthesia for a child with a syndrome can be challenging. Since acquiring this book, I have used it daily, either to brush up on familiar syndromes or to research the unfamiliar. In the operating room, it has proved more accessible than Google.

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