

Book review

Handbook for Somatosensory Rehabilitation, Claude Spicher, Sauramps Médical, Montpellier, France (2006). ISBN: 2-84023-470-X

This book is a useful compilation of evidence and ideas regarding somatosensory rehabilitation. Much of the material was developed by the author, Dr Spicher, from his somatosensory rehabilitation clinic. The text is generally well written and easy to read, despite occasional awkward English sentences. A thoughtful Foreword by Dr Dellon helps to orient the reader to where this book fits into the history and current practice of somatosensory rehabilitation. The Introduction by Dr Spicher explains how the aim of the book is to bring together information from the disciplines of rehabilitation, neuroscience, rheumatology, and surgery into a single volume for clinicians attempting to rehabilitate somatosensation.

As the title suggests, the volume is intended as a handbook and not as a complete, academic textbook on the topic. The main portion of the book is divided into two sections: a section focusing on evaluation and rehabilitation of basic somatosensory disorders and a section focusing on the prevention, evaluation, and rehabilitation of more complex somatosensory disorders.

The first section is titled “Definitions, Testing, and Rehabilitation of Basic Cutaneous Sense Disorders in Case of Neurological Lesions”. Chapter 1 starts by making several useful categorizations about somatosensation. The utility of these categorizations is not at the basic science level, but as a framework for clinicians to think about somatosensory modalities in their practice. The second chapter provides specific information about how to test cutaneous senses. As written, the evaluation could easily be followed by novice clinicians with little experience of somatosensory rehabilitation. A logical argument is given for the importance of doing specific tests, the importance of performing each test in a systematic way, and the importance of performing the set of tests in a specific order. Like many specialty areas of rehabilitation, somatosensory

rehabilitation would greatly benefit from a standardized, systematic, and thorough examination. This book proposes a reasonable one that could be readily used by most clinicians. The third chapter provides exact instructions on how to perform pressure perception threshold testing. Since this type of testing can be subject to errors if not done in a standardized manner, this chapter is valuable, even for those clinicians who’s primary focus is not somatosensory rehabilitation. The fourth and last chapter in this section covers rehabilitation of hyposensitivity. A number of specific techniques are suggested with detailed methodology as to how to apply them. Some of the techniques are to be done during therapy sessions and others are suggested as part of a home program. The techniques and their utility are largely derived from the author’s clinical experience vs. from extensive testing in rigorous randomized, controlled trials. The arguments for their value are logical, but the reader should recognize that much work is needed before we can begin to judge their efficacy. This chapter ends with three patient case examples that allow the reader to see how an overall program of somatosensory rehabilitation could be structured for specific individuals.

The second section is titled “Definitions, Testing, Rehabilitation, and Prevention of Painful Complications of Cutaneous Sense Disorders in Case of Peripheral Neurological Lesions”. The first chapter in this section provides an interesting argument and discussion of how basic somatosensory disorders can develop into painful and disabling conditions. The second chapter provides a history and description of the McGill Pain Questionnaire. The author appropriately promotes this questionnaire as a critical tool for evaluating and measuring these complex somatosensory disorders. The third chapter defines Mechanical Allodynia and provides detailed information on how to assess and treat this complicated problem. As with rehabilitation of the basic somatosensory disorders in Section 1, much of the evidence for these treatments is derived from the author’s extensive clinical experience. The fourth

chapter in Section 2 discusses how to desensitize the site of axonal lesions. Contained within this chapter is a step-by-step account of how to use pain scales.

This explicit description is valuable for the broader world of clinicians, most of whom use pain scales on a daily basis but without the rigorous (but not time consuming) application described here. The fifth chapter provides definitions, and suggestions for evaluation and treatment of neuralgias or neuropathic pains. The sixth chapter provides similar information for Complex Regional Pain Syndromes. The final chapter of Section 2 discusses prevention of these complex disorders and how to discuss this with individual patients who might be at risk. The premise that underlies this last chapter and much of Section 2 is that basic disorders will evolve into complex and disabling disorders if left untreated or if poorly treated. This premise is derived from impressive clinical evidence from the author's experience but has not been tested in larger, epidemiological studies.

Other attractive features of this book include the appendices and the historical information nested in each chapter. An extensive set of appendices are provided so that readers have the necessary materials to implement the ideas and treatments described in the book. A highly enjoyable aspect of this book was the fact that historical tidbits were woven into each topic addressed. The author should be commended for his extensive knowledge of this history and for sharing it with others. It was interesting to learn the historical context from which today's

definitions, evaluations, and treatments have emerged.

The tables and figures used throughout generally complement the text and make material quickly accessible. One problem with several figures is that they are described in the text and legend as having color, but are printed in black and white. This publication error means that the reader has to work a little harder to decipher what is illustrated in several figures.

In summary, this book attains its stated purpose of being a handbook for somatosensory rehabilitation. The step-by-step instructions can be readily followed by readers. It is clear in the Conclusion that the field of somatosensory rehabilitation has no room for impatient and imprecise clinicians. The material set forth in this book can now serve as a basis for systematic investigation of the evaluation and treatment of somatosensory rehabilitation.

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