

### **Epilepsy and the Family—A New Guide.**

Lechtenberg R. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1999.

Hardcover, 264 pages.

**E***pilepsy and the Family* describes epilepsy and its impact on epileptic patients and their families. The book is written for the lay public; however, health-care professionals can also benefit by learning how epilepsy affects all aspects of a person's life.

The introduction defines epilepsy, differentiating between seizures and epilepsy. The various causes and the pathophysiology of epilepsy are explained. The types of seizures are described in detail, with the features of each seizure type concisely listed in tables.

Chapters 2 to 5 discuss the difficulties that an adult with epilepsy may encounter. Depending on the type and the frequency of seizures, the epileptic patient may face guilt, isolation, and embarrassment. Employment difficulties often lead to inactivity and dependence, which can demoralize the patient and the family. The prognosis and the mortality statistics for various seizure types are discussed.

Marital problems, including isolation, loss of a reliable spouse, and increased responsibility for the unaffected partner, are described. Sexual activity can also be affected in people with epilepsy. Patients' real-life situations are used to illustrate these problems well. Family group meetings are suggested as useful therapy.

The effect of epilepsy and the medications used to treat the disorder are of concern to patients wishing to have children. Reproduction rates, the inheritance of epilepsy, the effect of seizures on the fetus, and the effects of pregnancy on the epileptic mother are addressed. Birth defects related to the use of antiepileptic medications are also outlined.

Chapter 6 discusses epilepsy in children. The causes of seizures in children include head injury, fever, poisoning, tumours, and disorders present at birth. Learning and behaviour problems, including the effects of antiepileptic drugs, are described. Strategies for managing childhood seizure disorders are discussed at the end of the chapter.

The difficulties for children growing up with an epileptic parent are described. Again, patient cases provide useful illustrations. Recommendations for dealing with these difficulties are given.

Chapter 10 discusses the diagnosis of epilepsy. Electroencephalography, magnetic resonance imaging,

and computed tomography are described in lay language illustrated by appropriate diagrams. The origin of seizures is described in further detail. Idiopathic, posttraumatic, postinfectious, parasitic disease, alcohol- and drug-related, tumour-related, vascular disease, and metabolic seizure disturbances are explained.

Treatment options are listed in chapter 11. Nonpharmacological therapy such as lifestyle changes, surgery, and group or family meetings are mentioned. Drugs of choice for each seizure type are presented in table format. A short description of each medication, including doses, side effects, and recommendations for monitoring of drug therapy, is given. It should be noted that the values quoted for the therapeutic range of drug levels may differ depending on the units used.

Management of the patient when a seizure occurs is outlined in the final chapter. Restraints, assisted breathing, aspiration, and premature activity should be avoided. A clearly defined plan, indicating procedures to follow when a seizure occurs, is recommended.

*Epilepsy and the Family—A New Guide* is written in easy-to-read language, and tables throughout the book highlight important points. The use of case reports allows the reader to relate to the difficulties encountered by the epileptic patient. However, caution should be exercised in following the recommendations for the drugs of choice for various seizure types, because such guidelines change frequently. As well, the dosage suggestions in chapter 11 may not be appropriate for all patients.

*Epilepsy and the Family—A New Guide* is a worthwhile read for anyone who works with epileptic patients. The book provides insight into the many challenges these patients face. Understanding these difficulties should allow family, friends, and health-care providers to offer greater empathy.

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