



# Book reviews

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## **Current problems in orthopaedics and trauma**

By R. C. Mohanti

Pp. 195. New Delhi: Jaypee Brothers Medical Publishers, 2009. ISBN: 978-81-8448-540-0. £18.00.

The pathology and epidemiology faced by orthopaedic surgeons is common throughout the world, but their incidence and frequency vary geographically. Visitors to India are always impressed by the high standard practised in the major centres, but in that vast country there are many rural areas where practitioners cannot confine their attention to a particular anatomical area, surgical technique or pharmacological treatment. Professor Mohanti has produced a well-written book with no pretension to be comprehensive. It is thoroughly practical, a working book, explaining the why and wherefore of each mode of management with sound, sensible shortcuts to investigation and diagnosis.

It is now increasingly difficult for anyone to write every chapter for a book with the same measure of expertise; and yet it is from the intimacy and character of a single teacher that the most creative messages are conveyed. This is not a book for the novice but for the established enthusiast in the very thick of training – which means all of us. It is richly, if selectively, referenced to provide the evidence for his logical approach to situations commonly seen in the Third World, but forgotten in the West, to its detriment. The book's 190 pages are full of hard-won experience, covering eight selected subjects, from tuberculosis and bone tumours to complications of internal fixation of fractures and low back pain. No reader is excluded by virtue of limited equipment, and outcomes are demonstrated by simple photographs; that of hip fracture, for example, is demonstrated by the photograph of the patient squatting – an accomplishment less essential in the West.

In his preface, Professor Mohanti expresses his thanks to the publishers, but it must be said that he has been let down by poor illustration. Excellent points are not helped by dark, opaque pictures; too many frankly obscure, and some wrongly labelled. The figure on page 124 shows a portal of entry for a nail 'too medial' when it is obviously too lateral. There is no mention in the text of the huge comminuted crack up the shaft of the femur, plainly visible on the book's cover, nor of the fact that the medulla has not been reamed

prior to the insertion of a massive intramedullary nail. Disaster was thus inevitable.

The preface is headed by a quotation from Andre Gide, to the effect that herewith is little that is new but much that has been forgotten, and regularly has to be re-learned. We live in an age when orthopaedic training places emphasis on perfection in appearance, which implies a certain cynicism of the healing process. This book, possibly aimed at his fellow countrymen, will be of huge value and importance to the practising surgeon in the West. Not to be aware of its message would be dangerous.

M. Laurence

## **Sir Herbert Seddon: and the book he nearly didn't write**

By J. Merrick

Pp. 221. London: Fugit Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-956574-0-5. £18.00

This is a very important book. It is not only an outstanding portrait of one of the more important figures in 20th century orthopaedics, but is also a compelling description of the development of surgery of the peripheral nerves.

The first chapter describes Seddon's early life from his education at Hulme grammar school (he was inexplicably turned down by Manchester Grammar School) through his studies at Bart's where he won a fistful of scholarships and the gold medal of the University of London, to his appointment as Nuffield Professor of Orthopaedics at Oxford in 1940. He had, of course, by this time also been awarded the Robert Jones gold medal of the British Orthopaedic Association.

It was at this point that he was first approached by Charles Macmillan, then manager of E & S Livingstone, the noted Edinburgh publishers, with an offer to publish his forthcoming book on peripheral nerve injuries. The second paragraph of this letter starts 'I therefore trust that you will make steady progress in its compilation...'. Thereafter progress was certainly steady, but there was the small matter of a World War to be endured, and a large clinical workload to accommodate. In 1948, he moved back to the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital (RNOH), taking the Peripheral Nerve Injury unit with him. His London practice flourished and he became increasingly involved in the work of the BOA, leading to his subsequent appointment as president. I am slightly sad that no space could be found for extracts from his 1961 presidential address to the BOA, although it is referenced. His waspish descriptions of various types of surgeon are as apposite today as they were 50 years ago. They should be more widely appreciated.