NERVE BLOCKS IN PALLIATIVE CARE

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ISBN: 0-19-852703-9 130 pages plus index
RRP: $A67.50

With the development of the speciality of palliative medicine, the wide availability of controlled release morphine together with an understanding of neuropathic pain and its treatment, the control of most cancer-related pain is now possible. There are however a small group of patients who may benefit from nerve blocks and it is to them and their health care providers that this small but ambitious book is directed.

There is a good description of coeliac plexus block and a chapter on spinal drug delivery. However a considerable amount of the rest of the book is spent discussing nerve blocks more commonly associated with the non-cancer pain population, the relevance of which is not entirely clear to this reviewer. I have no doubt that patients with cancer can have pain from spinal degenerative and other chronic conditions, however the number of patients found suitable for spinal cord stimulation – even if one includes refractory angina pectoris as an end of life condition – must be very small.

This is not a ‘How to do it’ book but a ‘Could this procedure be good for my patient book?’ The photographs and line diagrams are of quite variable quality and some of the radiographic images have reproduced very poorly.

To maximise the readership my suggestion would be to rename the book to something like An Introduction to Nerve Blocks for Non-anaesthetists, as I found very little specific to palliative care.

That said this book covers a very wide spectrum of interventional pain medicine and would be of value to most general medical and nursing libraries. There is appropriate emphasis on safety and monitoring and a focus on adequate patient information and consent. The importance of a team approach to decision making is also acknowledged.

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