

The Anesthesiologist's Bookshelf

Introduction to Acupuncture Anesthesia. By W. C. LOWE. Flushing, NY, Medical Examination Publishing Company, Inc., 1973. Pages: 101. Price: \$5.00.

A wave of interest in acupuncture engulfed the United States following President Nixon's visit to China. There followed a confusing flow of anecdotal reports concerning the efficacy of this form of pain therapy, hesitantly accepted in many anesthesiological circles because the many distinguished Chinese physicians and scientists residing in this country responded to the furor with deafening silence.

Now we have this small loose-leaf volume from the exquisite brush of Dr. William Lowe, who received his primary medical education in Shanghai, and his postgraduate training at the University of Pennsylvania and Temple University. Dr. Lowe is now a medical school faculty member, all of which is to say that he is able to and does exercise critical restraint in writing about acupuncture.

The reviewer is still among those puzzled by the acclaim given to this topic, seemingly at presidential behest, without the benefit of even such guidance as this little book affords. This is not the only field in which he has seen incompletely-baked ideas greeted with unwonted gentleness and lack of criticism simply because they originated outside the ambit of the English-publishing world (polywater, neurochronaxin theory of phonation, Krebiozen are a few that spring to mind). There is material here for an interesting study in international pecking order.

Dr. Lowe takes the reader pellucidly through the techniques of acupuncture, the recent developments of acupuncture anesthesia in China, the nervous system in relation to acupuncture, some guesses inevitably invoking gate-control theory, and some practical advice on electroanalgesia, electronic stimulators, and the selection of acupuncture points.

Inevitably, much of the evidence cited in support is inaccessible to a person illiterate in Chinese, but Dr. Lowe's low-key reporting suggests that there is substance to some of it.

It is interesting to note that the number of effective acupuncture points is a matter of opinion, some recognizing hundreds, others using only dozens. Particularly striking is the statement that at present almost all tonsillectomies in China are performed under acupuncture anesthesia.

The cogency of the author's treatment can be seen in a brief quotation explaining how acupuncture by subcutaneous stimulation can be as effective

as electroconvulsive shock transcutaneous stimulation:

The mere fact that acupuncture using electric stimulation has a beneficial influence on psychiatric disease, indicates that it not only possesses an analgesic effect but also acts directly on the cerebral cortex.

The treatment of psychiatric disease with acupuncture may sound incredible to the Western-trained psychiatrists. However, in certain ways, the application of electroacupuncture through the trigeminal nerve is analogous to the evolution of external to internal pacemaker for heart stimulation. The external pacemaker needs a current of 60 to 70 volts, the internal pacemaker a current of only one millivolt.

Some interesting and suggestive experimental results in animals are described, though a careful study of the protocols will be necessary for critical acceptance. Representative is one which reads in part:

Experiments to study acupuncture effects on blood pressure were carried out on laboratory animals. When the nerves of the animals were stimulated with a strong current, violent fluctuation of blood pressure ensued. Acupuncture rendered the fluctuation less or completely absent. If the nerve supplying the acupuncture point was cut, such an effect on the fluctuation of blood pressure disappeared.

This study was reported in the *Kuang-Ming Daily News* January 31, 1972.

Dr. Lowe has done his colleagues a great service in summarizing the practice and theory of acupuncture so clearly and interestingly.

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Bleeding Problems: Diagnosis and Treatment. By JOSEPH A. CAPRINI. Hagerstown, Maryland, Medical Department, Harper and Row, 1973. Pp. 62, \$2.95.

This is a succinct account of the pathophysiology of blood coagulation, with short notes on the treatment and management of hemorrhagic disorders. It is intended for clinicians and surgeons interested in a better understanding of coagulation problems and their treatment, which should include a lot of anesthesiologists. The mechanism of blood