

Book review

Parkinson's Disease – A Self-help Guide for Patients and Their Carers, by Marjan Jahanshahi and C. David Marsden, Souvenir Press (Educational & Academic) Ltd, London, 1998. ISBN 0-285-63317-1, £14.99.

This book is an attractive purchase not only because of its authors. It is aimed at sufferers from Parkinson's disease (PD) and their carers, and represents a comprehensive self-help guide. It is well laid out and covers numerous areas not normally tackled in the clinic, such as sexual relationships, inheritance of the disorder, car insurance and social security entitlements.

The following statement appears in the Preface: 'The patient and his or her family are often left unaided, to anticipate and adapt to the long-term social implications.' The aim of the book is to fill this gap in patient-doctor communication, and to provide the individual and his or her family with the essential information about the nature of the illness, its diagnosis and medical treatment, its implication for their daily lives, and about how best to cope with the changes brought about by it. This objective has been fulfilled. Although this book may not appeal to academics, it should not be dismissed lightly as it is informative in a format which is attractive and accessible. It avoids the pitfall of talking down to its readership, but rather provides full description of the implications PD has on every aspect of daily life. Whilst perhaps unsuitable for newly diagnosed patients who are just coming to terms with the condition, it certainly bears recommendation to those reaching the stage of questioning what is happening to them. With the information obtained here they will gain the encouragement and confidence to take a more active part in the management of their disease.

The contents are divided into three sections with a tailpiece as the last chapter. The first part describes the medical facts. Part two is used to talk about living with PD and coping with the disease is covered in part three. The Tailpiece neatly brings together the progress made over the years and the advances that are expected to be made in the future. Such advances will help in finding a cause and discovering methods

to alleviate the problems caused by the disease and its treatment. The contents page gives a clear overview of section, which allows speedy access to any area of interest.

The authors describe PD and its progression in a holistic manner. They do not only look at the disease, its symptoms and the available treatments, but see the patient who is suffering from it as whole person encountering a wide range of problems during the process. The description is in-depth without being too technical. All the medical terms are explained in easily understood language. The content is more reassuring than frightening. Coverage of the subject is comprehensive, and good use has been made of all the available literature. Throughout the text, examples are used in which people describe the specific problems they have experienced and how they have coped with them. The emphasis is on the fact it is a disorder to which individual response is very idiosyncratic. Patients and carers are recognised and acknowledged as the real experts. They are the people who provide us with the information, by sharing it and making themselves available for research projects. The problems that can occur are illustrated using daily activities. Being diagnosed as having a chronic and incurable disease causes psychological problems. The authors appropriately stress the psychological trauma produced by receiving a diagnosis of PD.

Unusually the book pays attention to the younger age group of PD sufferers and their specific problems. Work, finance, mortgages, children and sex are some of the problem areas discussed. One section is devoted to the carers, and the impact on their lives is addressed. Carers are encouraged to remain people in their own right who have added responsibilities. It is emphasised that they need to care themselves, as well as for their loved ones. The feelings and frustrations they will encounter are mentioned.

I thoroughly recommend this book.

Carla Norton
Clinical Nurse Specialist Parkinson's Disease,
RHH,
Sheffield



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