

Insights: Facts and Stories Behind Trigeminal Neuralgia

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This book's stated purpose is to provide general information for sufferers and others (sufferers' spouses and relatives, healthcare providers, lay persons) who want to learn more about trigeminal neuralgia. The author is well-known for her experience with and publications about this condition. The book is organized into 12 chapters that include diagnosis, anatomy, epidemiology, investigations, and patient care, including medical, nonmedical, and surgical management; decision making; complications of treatment; a list of support groups; research questions; and a glossary.

Chapter 1 deals with diagnosis. It is replete with patient narratives, cartoons, poetry, and diagrams, as are most chapters. Section headings are in the form of questions a patient might ask. In addition, the chapter gives references and criteria for diagnosing trigeminal neuralgia and also discusses the differential diagnosis of trigeminal neuralgia and other conditions. It finishes with a brief summary, as do all chapters, and references for further reading including websites, books, and articles. Chapter 2 describes the anatomy of the trigeminal nerve and causes of trigeminal neuralgia. The chapter finishes with a summary and references for further reading. Chapter 3 discusses the epidemiology of trigeminal neuralgia. At the end of the chapter there is a succinct summary of what has been said, and each section heading is posed in the form of a question that a trigeminal patient might ask. This chapter nicely combines science with poetry and cartoons. Chapter 4 is also a useful chapter on investigative approaches and their benefits and drawbacks. There are some good illustrations of x-rays and magnetic resonance images. The chapter is well-referenced, with examples of some of the questionnaires that the patient might encounter in an academic setting. Chapter 5 deals with the questions patients should ask their caregiver and how to choose the most appropriate person to care for them. It also includes guidelines for appraising the medical literature. Chapter 6 deals with medical management. It contains patient anecdotes, cartoons, diagrams, summaries, and references. Drugs are discussed alphabetically rather than in the order of their utility. Some of the drugs discussed have significant drawbacks and are not in use, and the chapter unfortunately does not outline possible hematologic and liver involvement and hyponatremia with carbamazepine and oxcarbazepine, which would be useful information for patients to have, even if these side effects are reasonably rare. The selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) fluoxetine is mentioned as being

useful for steady pain, but randomized controlled trials indicate that it is not very effective, and possibly completely ineffective, for the steady variety of neuropathic pain. Chapter 7 is a comprehensive review of a variety of alternative and complementary methods of managing trigeminal neuralgia. There is useful information here, although I think the chapter could have taken a stronger position on the utility of these methods, particularly aromatherapy, chiropractic techniques, the use of electromagnetic fields, homeopathy, naturopathic medicine, Qigong, Reiki, therapeutic touch, and traditional Chinese medicine; it should be emphasized that trigeminal neuralgia is clearly due to nerve injury or irritation and that the main approach is via pharmacotherapy and surgery, lest patients be led astray into one of these avenues. Chapter 8 discusses decision making. This is an excellent chapter because it provides a list of important questions that the patient should ask the surgeon, and it also discusses some models for decision making. In addition to a summary with references for further reading, there is an appendix in this chapter on how to search the Internet, which should certainly be useful for some patients. Chapter 9, another important chapter, deals with surgical management. It is very thorough and provides an excellent discussion of the possible complications of surgery. It also covers many approaches that are not in common use, but it could have been a bit more directive in terms of indicating what the more useful procedures are. The chapter has references for further reading that are quite comprehensive. Chapter 10 is about recurrences and managing side effects and complications of treatment. This is another comprehensive chapter, with references for further reading. Chapter 11 lists support groups. Chapter 12 deals with research questions. There is a very useful and comprehensive glossary of medical terminology. A general comment about many chapters is that the print is so small for some of the images that it is virtually unreadable without a magnifying glass. Other images contain unnecessary medical terminology that requires the lay reader to consult the glossary or illustrations using anatomic representations that are not readily interpretable.

In summary, there is an enormous amount of information in this book and, I think, it is a very useful reference book for the audience for which it is intended. I shall be recommending this book to my patients and their families and am already using it as a resource.

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