

BOOK REVIEW

Title: "BACK PAIN – THE FACTS"
Author: Malcolm I. V. Jayson
Publisher: Oxford University Press, 1981
Price: £4.95

Chronic back pain sufferers are usually the people who comb the bookshelves for new books on the treatment of back pain, in the hopes that someone will tell them a way to gain relief.

A book such as this one, entitled "Back Pain – the facts" by Prof. Malcolm I. V. Jayson will no doubt be considered the very book everyone has been waiting for.

If read from beginning to end it is an interesting attempt to cover the known facts, causes and treatments of back pain.

The chapter on "Discs – slipped or burst?" dispelled very firmly the long held theory by most people of a "flat biscuit-like structure that slips sideways or backwards between the bones of the spine." The description of a "burst" disc and its diagnosis by its presenting symptoms, and X-ray reading of Myelography and Radiculography, give valuable information.

The chapter on "Mechanical problems and backache" presents a great deal of information on wear and tear in the spine. As a very large number of patients with back pain symptoms are found to have osteoarthritis and lumbar spondylosis, I feel it would have been of value to have these conditions clearly sub-titled, rather than described as wear and tear conditions. Patients tend only to hear part of what is said to them and on seeing a chapter later in the book headed "Ankylosing spondylitis and related disorders" they may well mistake this for their condition of "spondylosis" and become extremely distressed.

Most patients seeking help would probably turn first to the chapter on "Physical methods of treatment" and the first part of the chapter on beds and bed rest – recovery period and prophylactic care in back-schools is good valuable information. However, the description and comments on other forms of treatment seem to be based on biased, personal opinion. It would have been better to put all the treatments administered by Chartered Physiotherapists under one heading. It is a shame that even the scant appreciation of the benefits of heat, cold, massage and exercise is so derogatory and many patients might well be put off bothering to use the skills of physiotherapists which could alleviate so many of their symptoms. No physiotherapist would introduce a programme of exercise such as is described on page 75. Exercise programmes are always worked out carefully and progressed according to the patient's ability and recovery.

The section on manipulation starts well with clear description of its history and development. However, I feel it would have been better to describe the training in, and methods of manipulation given by physicians, surgeons and chartered physiotherapists before osteopaths and chiropractic – which are still considered fringe medicine and not recognised by medical insurance companies.

The chapter "Prevention of back pain" is valuable and interesting. Training in lifting and handling, and posture in standing and sitting form as essential part of back care programmes taught by chartered physiotherapists – a fact that is not mentioned.

The final chapters cover disorders other than known mechanical conditions – which I feel could come under one general heading.

This is a book which must be read thoroughly to appreciate the careful consideration and opinions of methods of treatment available. Superficial reading gives the impression that Dr. Jayson's personal opinion is that most available treatments have a limited value and with bed rest the back pain will go away – eventually.

M. John