

For: Handbook for Somatosensory Rehabilitation by Claude Spicher

Foreword

This new edition of Claude Spicher's excellent "*Handbook for Somatosensory Rehabilitation*" covers every important aspect of the field. It describes recent advances in diagnosing the various clinical states and the procedures to combat them. It will stimulate all health professionals who are dedicated to the management of pain and associated problems.

The field of pain has recently undergone a major revolution. Historically, pain has been a unidimensional sensation produced by injury or disease. We now possess a much broader concept that comprises the emotional, cognitive and somatosensory dimensions of pain experience, as well as an impressive array of new approaches to pain management. Chronic pain especially, is now a major challenge to all health sciences and professions.

An important component of the gate control theory which I proposed with Patrick Wall is that somatosensory stimuli of various kinds—electrical pulses, massage, vibration, cold, heat—can "close the gate" to those nerve impulse patterns that generate pain. The theory also recognizes that pain is a multidimensional experience determined by psychological as well as physical factors, which broadens the scope of pain therapies. Patients with chronic pain need every bit of the armamentarium to battle the pain. John Bonica, a brilliant anaesthesiologist, played a huge role in these developments. He contended that chronic pain is not a "symptom" but a syndrome in its own right, and requires therapists from a wide range of disciplines.

The recognition that pain is the result of multiple determinants gave rise to a variety of psychological approaches such as relaxation and cognitive therapies and also provided an explanation for the effectiveness of transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) and physical therapy procedures that bring substantial pain relief to large numbers of people.

The pain revolution has taken us from a direct-line pain pathway to an open biological system that comprises multiple sensory inputs, memories of past experiences, personal and social expectations, genetic contributions, gender, aging, and stress patterns involving the endocrine, autonomic and immune systems. Pain is now universally recognized as a major challenge for all health sciences and professions. Every aspect of life, from birth to dying, has characteristic pain problems. Genetics, until recently, was rarely considered relevant to understanding pain, but sophisticated epidemiological and laboratory studies have established genetic predispositions related to pain as an essential component of the field. The study of pain, therefore, has broadened and now incorporates research in epidemiology and medical genetics as well as sociological and cultural studies.

This “*Handbook for Somatosensory Rehabilitation*” encompasses chronic as well as acute forms of pain. It highlights a mission for all of us: to provide relief from all forms of chronic pain. We must also encourage patients to communicate about their pain, which stimulated me to develop the McGill Pain Questionnaire. If we pursue these goals together, as members of the full range of health professions, we can hope to meet the goal we all strive for: to help our fellow human beings who suffer pain.

Ronald Melzack
McGill University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

