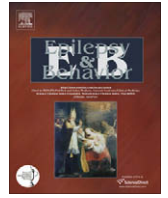


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Book Review

Epilepsy: 199 Answers. A Doctor Responds to his Patients' Questions. 3rd ed. By Andrew N. Wilner, M.D., FACP, FAAN, Demos, New York, 2008. Softcover, 180 pp. \$19.95. ISBN 1932603352/9781932603354.

Epilepsy: 199 Answers aims to provide a written reference for patients with epilepsy and their families to use as a supplement along with discussions with their physician, to provide further information about their illness. Although physicians may have the impression that their discussions with their patients are complete, the reality is that patients always want more information, and usually need to hear the same information more than once, perhaps for psychological or neurological reasons. This volume, organized into a question-and-answer format, is especially patient-friendly and patient-respectful, in that the questions are exactly phrased in an accessible patient-oriented vernacular.

The author, Dr. Andrew Wilner, is a unique physician among us in that he has been a medical writer for many years, with varied activities from covering newsworthy neurological topics to writing practice parameters. He has also always had a hand in patient care, particularly in epilepsy, and therefore has the ability to envision and fill in the space between what health care providers think their patients are hearing and what the patients actually hear in the dialog. This makes him remarkably able to undertake this sort of book, which, in a way, bridges this gap.

The book includes several topics that are not always addressed in such consumer-oriented books, and I found the frank discussion of nonepileptic seizures, clinical research trials, and sudden unexplained death in epilepsy (including the wise caveat “seizure control may reduce the risk of SUDEP”) refreshing. Like many health care-oriented teaching tools, the chapters begin with a case, which immediately draws in the reader, and although it might feel a little voyeuristic for patients, it can also put them at ease and make them feel less alone with their illness; patients with epilepsy often are pretty self-isolating due to the perceived stigma of the illness. Topics that patients simply cannot hear enough about, such as medication side effects and issues for women with epilepsy, are covered clearly and concisely. Dr. Wilner does not shy away from issues that doctors may avoid or simply not address, such as sexual side effects of antiseizure medications. The short chapter for parents of children with epilepsy is also direct and concise, addressing obvious concerns that all who work in epilepsy have thought about and addressed with patients, such as the possibility of outgrowing seizures and lifestyle concerns, for example, sports and computer games. The chapter on seizures and work unfolds in an interesting manner. This is illustrative of the comprehensive approach in this book: it starts with a question that a person newly diagnosed with epilepsy is likely to think but may be afraid to ask—“Can people with epilepsy work?” (The answer is nuanced with both a reassuring statement and a cautionary statement that probably could have used more exploration.) The chapter evolves to provide practical information about disclosure in the workplace, legal

protection in the face of discrimination, and resources for vocational assistance.

The appendixes after the question-and-answer chapters of the book will probably be the most useful portion for many patients, providing templates for keeping track of health care information and seizures, drug names and their manufacturers, a handy reference for driving regulations in each state, extensive contact information for epilepsy centers and consumer advocacy groups, and an instructive glossary of terms that could elevate the lexicon and jargon of consumers nearly to that of doctors and nurses. The bibliography is complete with references for additional educational and supportive information written both for and by persons with epilepsy. There is also an extensive index, and throughout the book, topics are conveniently cross-referenced, which in a tidy volume like this is actually not cumbersome.

Clear strengths of the book are the accessible format and the comprehensive and frank approach. It is actually appealing to consider recommending this book to patients, as the information presented is likely to seamlessly supplement the discussions we have with patients in the office. The appendixes can be empowering for patients as well. Perhaps a strength, but something that may also be perceived as a drawback, is the highly personal and case-based presentation. The hands-on tone of Dr. Wilner's discussions lends an immediacy to the advice given herein, and the at-times authoritative delivery reflects both experience and caring. I am pleased that there is a discussion of seizure first-aid in both Chapter 13 and Appendix J, as well as a plan for first-aid in the workplace in Appendix L. This is such an important topic for the patient and the people around him or her, both at home and in the workplace. Understanding the simple first-aid for seizures can go a long way toward decreasing the stigma of epilepsy in general. The discussion of why epilepsy occurs when the tests are unrevealing could have included a brief explanation of the genetic contributions to seizure disorders, which are still unfolding in the research arena: I find that patients are reassured by this discussion, in that there is less self-blame about the “why” of epilepsy.

The liveliness and sense of patient involvement by the author are unique to this book and distinguishes it from other volumes. However, the question-and-answer format is what makes it really special. A patient can simply look in the contents and find the specific question that has been on his or her mind (but perhaps was afraid to ask!).

Readership of this book could encompass patients, families, caretakers, and others involved with persons with epilepsy. The broad number of topics reflects both the medical and lifestyle concerns for persons with epilepsy, and therefore, this book could be enlightening for many people whose lives intersect with them. Primarily though, it is suited for patients, and should provide a reassuring supplement to office visits. The sensible outlook that Dr. Wilner imparts to many of the topics I find to be on target with what I would like my patients to learn. Further, he conveys that doctors really are very involved with their patients and care about

them; this is another attitude I would like my patients to know. There are international resources listed in the appendixes, which could extend the readership of this book as well.

I recommend this book to patients as a way for them to learn more about various aspects of epilepsy and to support and extend the information from office visits. I believe this book is particularly relevant for patients newly diagnosed with epilepsy. Demos-Health's list price is \$19.95, which is probably reasonable for most patients, although this book would be a fantastic "freebie" for patients and would likely add value and future loyalty to office visits if it could be cheaply acquired by doctors' offices. For such a mysterious illness like epilepsy, consumers seem to never get enough

information; the nature of the illness, I think, makes patients try to gain some control over it through knowledge and understanding. Our time with patients is limited and I think this book is a perfectly modulated package of information to support the need our patients have for understanding epilepsy both conceptually and practically. I highly recommend it for patients with epilepsy and their families.

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¹ Dr. Harden has not conflict of interest in regard to this book or the author.