
The complex anatomy of the temporal bone and skull base represents a challenge for even advanced trainees. Those of us who poured over Ralph Nelson’s temporal bone dissection manual while we were in training know that it is a perfect distillation of the fundamental principles of temporal bone drilling. Although the Nelson dissection guide remains a wonderful teaching tool, the black and white sketches do not provide trainees with an adequate image of the actual appearance of the structures that will appear in their specimens. Without those pictures in their mind’s eye, trainees often do not recognize important structures in the temporal bone laboratory until they have been violated. In this regard, The Temporal Bone: A Manual for Dissection and Surgical Approaches represents a most welcome addition to the teaching arsenal for neurotology. Although the hardcover book, rife with color photographs, is too nice to risk splattering with bone dust at the drilling station, it is a valuable resource for use as an accompanying text for study before and after drilling.

After a brief introduction to temporal anatomy, the authors launch into a discussion of surgical approaches in order of complexity. The descriptive text and the photographs each stand separately with their own inherent narrative arc. This format is highly effective, allowing the reader to first conceptualize the approach and then maintain focused attention on the anatomic structures uncovered with each step. The chapters on basic techniques such as mastoidectomy are not as strong as the later chapters on approaches to the skull base. The section on simple mastoidectomy, the most important approach for junior trainees to master, is relatively short with only two pages of text. As is probably the case for every such book, the author’s biases are revealed in the procedures chosen for inclusion. For example, the retrosigmoid approach is discussed only in the context of the combined retrosigmoid-retrolabyrinthine approach.

The book suffers from occasional sloppy editing with mislabeled photographs and transcription errors. For example, the surgical instruments needed to equip the laboratory include two Freers, three straight dissectors, four round dissectors. While waiting for the partridge in a pear tree one, the reader realizes that the authors meant this to be a numbered list. Additionally, some of the terms used are different from those used in the United States; for example, “closed” versus “open” tympanoplasty for canal-wall-up versus canal-wall-down mastoidectomy techniques. Middle ear procedures such as stapes surgery and ossicular chain reconstruction are not included. The bulk of the images consists of photographs that are, for the most part, excellent. They are painstakingly labeled and capture the flow of each procedure at appropriate intervals. The color sketches that often precede the photographs are suboptimal; however, fortunately, these diagrams are not integral to the chapters.

Despite these minor flaws, this dissection manual is very readable. The “open” tympanoplasty chapter contains a nice discussion of how to finesse the canal-wall-down technique. Each chapter addresses potential obstacles and illustrates their management; for example, included in the cochlear implant chapter is a discussion on handling the ossified cochlea, and the chapter on translabyrinthine approaches details management of the high riding jugular bulb. The chapters on transotic and infratemporal fossa approaches are particularly good, helping to synthesize the relationships between intracranial structures and the skull base.

With its emphasis on more advanced approaches, The Temporal Bone is perhaps most valuable for the advanced resident or neurotology fellow. It certainly belongs on the shelf of the neurotologist who is involved in teaching temporal bone anatomy and in the libraries of otolaryngology training programs.

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This English edition of Basic Otorhinolaryngology is a revised and updated translation of the second German edition published in 2004 authored by a group of international leaders in their respective fields of otolaryngology. This well-written and concise textbook provides a comprehensive introduction to the fundamentals of basic otolaryngology and head and neck surgery and includes the latest developments to date. The stated goal of the authors was to present the material in an “easy-to-learn, user-friendly format,” distilling a complex array of information into brief study units each beginning with a “starter,” which essentially provides a summary of the unit topic, states its relative importance, and crossreferences to the other units.

This textbook is nicely organized into four main chapters based on anatomic location and further divided into a total of 19 subchapters. Unique features of this book are the convenient brief study units, which are embedded within each subchapter. Fashioned similar to a lecture series, each study unit is presented in a clear and concise manner richly illustrated with high-resolution color images, detailed drawings, tables, graphs, and flow charts. Additionally, there are attention symbols to represent
points of emphasis and boxed texts to provide information that goes beyond basic understanding, including operating techniques, case study reports, and historical information. As the authors note, the form and content of the book place it in the category of an excellent textbook for medical students and beginning residents. However, an experienced otolaryngologist may find it somewhat rudimentary for use as a reference source. In particular, the subchapters on malignancies of the head and neck are comparatively lacking in detail but are ideal in providing information for medical professionals in other disciplines. On careful assessment by this reviewer, it appears that the authors’ goals outlined here have been met well. They offer a highly effective, affordably priced ($59.95) introductory textbook of otolaryngology for aspiring medical students and residents.

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