

In Your Good Books

by Seamus Sweeney MD



Evidence-based book helps tract evolving treatments for AMD

AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION.

FRANK G. HOLZ, DANIEL PAULEIKHOFF, RICHARD F. SPAIDE, AND ALAN C. BIRD.
SPRINGER VERLAG. BERLIN, 2004. WITH 106 FIGURES AND 20 TABLES.

Demographic nightmares change from generation to generation. Many readers will remember the neo-Malthusian projections of doom from too many babies being born. The population explosion was primed to explode into all of our horrible futures.

In these early years of the 21st century, in Europe at least, the opposite fear now grips the public: too few babies, too few workers in twenty years, and too many grey-haired pensioners. The World Health Organization predicts that by the year 2025 the world will have 1.2 billion people aged 60 years and over.

Aside from anything else, the ageing population will remould medical practice. Cancers and dementias will become more common, as our treatment of cardiac and respiratory conditions improves and preventive measures become enshrined in law and even morality.

Ophthalmology is not free from the effects of this trend. As Holz, Pauleikhoff, Spaide and Bird write in their preface, age-related macular degeneration (AMD) has become the most common cause of severe visual loss in the industrialised world.

Beginning with a chapter on the epidemiology of AMD, we read of the diagnostic criteria and the classification used in epidemiological studies. This chapter is exemplary in its definition of basic epidemiological and statistical terms and its

use of a wide range of evidence in support. The authors of the chapter – Klaver, van Leeuwen, Vingerling and de Jong – also critically examine the evidence for the various postulated risk markers for AMD.

The most striking and evidence-based findings are an exponential association between AMD and age among white populations, a very low incidence of late stages in black populations, a significant family history in the overall occurrence of the disease, and a very strong association of all types of AMD with smoking. Genetics merits its own – albeit short – chapter, summarising the exciting but thus far inconclusive search for genetic loci linked with AMD.

The first edition of this book was published in 1997. As the authors note, in that short time, knowledge on the molecular and genetic levels has greatly improved. Microsurgical approaches have been further developed, radiation treatments have fallen by the wayside, and photodynamic therapy has been introduced. Clearly, the clinical practice in treating AMD is dynamic.

After chapters on the pathophysiology and histopathology of AMD, we move on to the nub of the matter for most clinicians – the clinical presentation and management. Co-editors Frank Holz and Daniel Pauleikhoff contribute the chapter on clinical manifestations.

One of the important aspects of AMD to

bear in mind is that the pathological changes seen in AMD are not unique to the condition. Angiographic classification is an important factor in determining how one proceeds therapeutically.

Fundus angiography, therefore, has a chapter to itself, as do the tests of macular function which are vitally important to guiding treatment options. There is also a chapter on the crucial factor of reading, the one which will probably determine more than any other whether the patient objectively perceives any intervention to be a success. In a later chapter on magnifying reading aids in AMD, we read of the great importance of prescribing a magnification device as early as possible in AMD.

The authors of this chapter also urge practitioners to challenge the folk belief, surprisingly persistent among all sections of the community, that reading somehow “harms the eye.” Reading and training to read results in better use and preservation of the residual function of the eye.

The chapters on the clinical interventions themselves – laser, surgical, thermotherapy, radiation and pharmacological – are all clear and evidence-based. However, the editors note that radiation treatment, for instance, may lack a clear evidence-base at the

moment but that is no reason to abandon it or to abandon all future study.

Nonetheless, evidence-based practice is a boon of modern medicine and perhaps has become – far more than we realise – what defines us as a profession. This book is very firmly evidence-based and its judicious analysis of the available studies is admirable.

