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Book Reviews

Larry Alan Bear

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BOOK REVIEW

LESIONS OF THE LUMBAR INTERVERTEBRAL DISC. By R. Glen Spurling, M.D., Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Co., 1953. Pp. xi, 148. \$4.75.

At first blush the review of a medical book might seem out of place in a law review. However, the attorney who is in any way involved in personal injury litigation arising under the admiralty, railroad, tort, or workmen's compensation laws well knows the value, or, one might say, the absolute necessity, of having a comprehensive and intelligent acquaintance with all branches of medicine. Very often the key to liability and damages—the double doors of personal injury litigation—is a clear and fundamental understanding of the medical issues involved in the case at bar.¹ Thus it seems only proper that the attention of the legal profession be drawn to those medical publications which, by helping the attorney better to understand, prepare, and present or defend the personal injury action with which he is concerned, will prove of inestimable value to bench and bar alike.

Of all the industrial injuries with which the workmen's compensation attorney must deal, none have created as much interest, or caused as much comment in recent years, among doctors and lawyers alike, as have injuries to the intervertebral discs.² Disc injury litigation is not confined to workmen's compensation cases, however. There are numerous claims arising constantly in other fields where tort type damages may be recovered; *i.e.*, damages for pain and suffering, future loss of wages and the like, as

¹ Very recently two prominent law reviews have devoted entire issues to medico-legal problems, pointing up the growing feeling in the legal profession today that there is the necessity for a better correlation of the law and medical science. 31 Tex. L. Rev., No. 6 (1953); 6 Vanderbilt L. Rev., No. 4 (1953). The Southwestern Legal Foundation, in cooperation with the Southern Methodist University School of Law, in December of 1953 devoted three days to an institute on personal injury litigation.

² Bear, *Intervertebral Disc Injuries in Workmen's Compensation*, 6 Vand. L. Rev. 883 (1953).

opposed to the statutorily limited sums recoverable under the various state compensation acts. In two recent cases there were verdicts of \$60,000 for each of two plaintiffs who sustained disc injuries.³ In the light of such verdicts, it is not difficult to see how important it is for the plaintiff or defendant trial lawyer to have a fundamental understanding of the intervertebral disc as a medical entity if he is to do a proper job for his client in these cases.

There is no single book on the subject of intervertebral discs better calculated to give a complete understanding of the subject to the reader than Doctor Spurling's monograph, *Lesions of the Lumbar Intervertebral Disc*. In this book the author, as eminent neurosurgeon, and presently clinical professor of surgery (neurosurgery), University of Louisville School of Medicine, draws upon his 15 years of continuous investigation of the lumbar intervertebral disc and its lesions, and also upon preceding works such as the book he co-authored with Doctor F. Keith Bradford, entitled, "The Intervertebral Disc," to present a practical account of the lumbar intervertebral disc and the pathological processes which may occur in it.

It may be appropriate to state here that there are incidents of cervical and, on rare occasions, thoracic disc lesions, but the overwhelming majority of so-called "ruptured disc" conditions occur in the lumbar disc area. Moreover, Doctor Spurling's discussion of discs actually embraces cervical and thoracic, as well as lumbar, discs.

In this book the author presents clearly embryologic and anatomic considerations, describing the anatomy and function of intervertebral discs. The author then goes on to describe the disc lesion to which most of his discussion is directed: the tearing of

³ *Albertson v. Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad Co.* (Circuit Court, Mower County, Austin, Minn., December, 1952); *Walker v. Chicago Great Western Railroad* (Circuit Court, Cook County, Chicago, Ill., No. 51C1529, Oct. 10, 1952). Both cases are unreported but may be found discussed in 11 NACCA L. J. 242 (May, 1953).

the outer covering of the disc (rupture of the annulus fibrosus), and the resultant oozing forth of the inner material of which the disc is composed (herniation of the nucleus pulposus). The anatomic factors which predispose to herniation are discussed, as well as the varying results of herniation. There is also information relating to causation, a truly important area for the attorney.

The section of the book dedicated to discussion of the clinical picture and diagnosis is extremely valuable to attorneys, for, having gained an enlightened layman's understanding of the medical profession's approach to intervertebral disc lesions, the lawyer is in a better position to work along with his doctor to prepare his case properly, and also, he is better equipped to examine and cross-examine the expert medical witness.

An excellent discussion of myelography—the special "X-ray" process used to detect disc lesions—is contained in the book, and with a thorough understanding of this procedure, and the results obtained therefrom, the attorney is better able to evaluate the relative importance of negative or positive myelograms as evidence in a court of law.

The author dedicates a portion of his work to the results of disc surgery in compensation cases, and it is interesting and significant to learn that the surgical results in this area are the worst that have ever been reported by any medical group.

Lesions of the Lumbar Intervertebral Disc is a book that belongs on the shelf of every personal injury trial lawyer. Although written primarily for the medical profession, the material contained therein is so clearly and effectively presented that any attorney, through concentration and a minimum of effort, can master it to the extent of being able to handle effectively any legal problems concerning disc injuries that might arise.

It must be remembered that the lawyer approaches the disc lesion situation with a view to financial recovery for his client, or

with the view of preventing such recovery, as the case might be. The doctor is concerned with the problem of adequate diagnosis and treatment. The attorney hopes and expects that the doctor will understand his problems, but this can never be if the attorney does not understand the doctor's approach.

With this in mind, we can say that Doctor Spurling's book serves two important purposes for the lawyer: First, it will give him a fundamental understanding of the intervertebral disc as a medical entity, and enable him properly to approach such important medico-legal questions as causation, disability, and evaluation of medical evidence in disc cases. Secondly, it will give him a clear picture of the doctor's approach to the problem of disc lesions, an approach he must be familiar with in order to work effectively and harmoniously with his medical expert, and in order to handle efficiently any opposing medical experts. With the knowledge thus gained from this book, the lawyer will be in a better position to appreciate the legal problems involved in his cases, and thus will be in a better position to advance his client's cause.

*Larry Alan Bear.**

*Member, Bear and Bear, Boston, Massachusetts; author, *Intervertebral Disc Injuries in Workmen's Compensation*, 6 Vand. L. Rev. 883 (1953); Co-Editor, English and Spanish Edition, REPORT ON THE FIRST INSTITUTE ON REHABILITATION PROBLEMS IN PUERTO RICO (1950).

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