

## Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

*edited by David M. Dawson and Thomas D. Sabin, 218 pp, \$65, ISBN 0-316-17748-2, Boston, Mass, Little Brown & Co Inc, 1993.*

Mention chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) and most physicians will surely react. While many may dismiss CFS as "yuppie flu" or a crook's disease, others will testify to its legitimacy and importance. The editors of this text have brought together a panel of experts to enlighten us about the mysteries of this controversial and confusing illness. I started off as a skeptic about this syndrome; I believe I am less so now.

The editors acknowledge the controversy surrounding this illness in the preface. The first chapter opens with the history and epidemiology of CFS and closes with the American and British research case definitions of the disease. I found this to be one of the most interesting chapters of the book. The authors present the material clearly and without bias.

The next 12 chapters are somewhat uneven owing to the varying styles of the "guest" authors (the majority of whom are from either Glasgow, Scot-

land, or Boston, Mass). I tended to believe those authors who were honest in their assessment of the embryonic state of investigation into this disease rather than those who seemed to try too hard to make a point. Some of the authors started off with a very reasonable and scientific explanation of a particular finding or symptom and then lapsed into "pleading his/her case." Others were much more measured in their descriptions and explanations and often admitted that certain tests or treatments were nondiagnostic or no better than placebo.

Each chapter covers a different aspect of the disease, eg, "Fatigue" and "Psychiatric Aspects." Some of the more interesting chapters deal with the differential diagnosis of fatigue in relation to CFS and other diseases.

Almost every chapter opens with a definition of CFS. In fact, the opening paragraphs of two consecutive chapters were almost identical. Although redundant for the cover-to-cover reader, this arrangement allows for a comprehensive review of a particular aspect of CFS without reading the entire book.

The most plausible explanation of CFS, at least from what I could gather from the book, is that the syndrome is a response by certain sus-

ceptible individuals to an unknown agent or toxin that results in a fairly predictable chain of events. Female gender, a career in the medical field, and preexisting psychiatric problems seem to be common, although by no means exclusive, threads in the affected population.

This is an interesting and maybe definitive text about a confusing and controversial illness. I am somewhat less skeptical than I was before reading the book. I believe the disease to be an unusual sensitivity of a certain subset of susceptible individuals.

Owing to the controversial nature of the syndrome and the paucity of knowledge about it, little information that can be used easily in a general practice is presented. Each chapter is profusely referenced, and many have over 50 citations. This might be a useful text for those readers with a specific question or special interest in the syndrome; however, the average practitioner probably would have little need for this publication.

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