BOOK REVIEW

F. P. Kendall, E. K. McCreary, P. G. Provance, M. McIntyre Rodgers and W. A. Romani. Muscles – Testing and function with posture and pain (5th edition). Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, Baltimore. 2005. 480 pp. Price: $74.95.

The fifth edition of the classic work Muscles – Testing and function with posture and pain, by Florence Kendall and co-authors, provides professionals in the area of physical therapy and rehabilitation with lots of information not only about physical examination, but also about therapy and treatment of musculoskeletal dysfunction.

The book contains indeed much of the rehabilitation knowledge taught in many physical therapy schools and is regarded as one of the standard references when dealing with assessment of muscle function. This edition provides, besides much of the original work of Henry Kendall, some newer paragraphs and colour photographs, which makes the book even more interesting from an historical point of view. Additionally, a CD-ROM with the Primal 3D Anatomy is included, which is nicely presented, but does not really add to the value of the book.

As already mentioned, it is a historically important work and the reader may appreciate that fact. However, it is a pity that its contents did not develop as one should expect in a profession that is constantly adding new material to its body of knowledge. Glancing at the bibliography, one can notice that many of the references used are really outdated, especially the separate section entitled “Suggested Reading” at the end of the book (references from the 1900s to 1992).

The first chapter, “Fundamental Concepts”, gives an overview about the philosophy of the book, namely “getting back to basics”. It is clearly written and provides the reader with basic information concerning strength testing procedures and grading system, nerve plexus and treatment fundamentals, with special emphasis on polio and post-polio tests and treatment. Chapter 2 deals with bad posture, which is considered the origin of many musculoskeletal problems in the human body. Postural alignment and examination are described in detail and some information about development, flexibility and corrective exercises are discussed. The next five chapters are the classical chapters, known from previous versions, and represent a systematic and anatomical approach to muscle strength tests. The individual sections describe the respective innervation, joints, movements and tests for muscle length and strength (with grading). Many tips and tricks are given for each muscle test, which makes the book very practical.

Without wanting to reduce the value of the book, it is notable that no attention is given to the validity, reliability, sensitivity and specificity of the tests. The section on “Objectivity and reliability in muscle testing” provides little information with respect to what scientific work has been carried out in order to propose a clinically validated assessment instrument. The assumption that “…our hands are the most sensitive, fine-tuned instruments available” is somewhat flawed by the lack of evidence for manual muscle strength testing. However, because of the fact that the book has other than scientific objectives, it may be considered a practical guideline for manual muscle strength assessment. In any case, Muscles – Testing and function with posture and pain remains a standard work that many of us will still be using for a long time.

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