

V.I. Sreenivas

**Acute Disorders
of the Abdomen**
Diagnosis and Treatment

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With a Foreword by C. E. Welch

With 33 Illustrations

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Foreword

The acute abdomen often perplexes the expert as well as the young physician. There are few areas in medicine in which Hippocrates' aphorism—the art is long, life is short, decision difficult, and delay perilous—is more applicable than here. Too often the harried physician fails to listen to the patient who is trying desperately to suggest the diagnosis. The significance of various types and location of pain often are neglected by the doctor. Physical findings are influenced by experience; the presence or absence of tenderness or a mass may be answered in entirely different ways by various observers.

Because solid facts frequently are lacking, attempts to resolve diagnostic dilemmas by computer analysis or by algorithms are not likely to be successful. Fortunately, in the great majority of cases, unusual and difficult diagnostic procedures are not necessary for the identification of the acute abdomen and of the major disease. Astute clinical judgment must be based primarily upon careful attention to the patient's words and detailed observation.

The author first considers the features of the acute abdomen and then describes specific diseases that include nearly all abdominal emergencies. The common and frequently confusing diseases of the female genitourinary tract receive full recognition. The book is not a manual of operative technique; rather the author indicates alternative procedures that the surgeon may employ in solution of the problems found

at the time of operation. He considers the most recent methods of diagnosis that are being developed but emphasizes the primary importance of diagnostic tests that have been confirmed by long experience.

The author has produced a practical handbook based upon clinical experience that will give a clear, detailed guide to the young practitioner. This book honors the memory of Dr. Douglas Farmer, from whom the author learned many of his clinical skills. Dr. Farmer, who unfortunately died in the flower of his professional life, was taught by his former chief Dr. Reginald Smithwick. Both of them were precise, careful surgeons who combined investigatory talent with sound technical ability and a penchant for transmitting their knowledge to others. For example, their collaborative efforts led to the popularization of vagotomy and antrectomy as the preferred operation for duodenal ulcer. It is a pleasure to see such tendencies perpetuated in this work of another generation of their pupils.

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Preface

Acute disorders of the abdomen require early recognition and prompt treatment if mortality and morbidity are to be minimized. Patients are not necessarily examined by surgeons early in the course of their illness, but by family physicians, internists, pediatricians, obstetricians, or gynecologists, and in a hospital emergency room they are seen by medical students, interns, and residents—medical personnel of different interests and levels of training. A “core knowledge” of acute abdomen is necessary for early recognition and proper management of patients, regardless of one’s specialization and level of training. While there is no substitute for clinical experience, a book that provides in a concise manner the core knowledge could assist in minimizing the errors, thereby improving the quality of patient care. This book provides that core knowledge.

The first part of the book deals with the general approach and the methods of examination and evaluation of patients suspected of having an acute abdomen. In the second part the more commonly occurring specific conditions responsible for acute abdomen are considered. For a better understanding of the clinical spectrum of presentation and the clinical setting in which the specific condition arises, the causes and the pathophysiology of the disease process are included in the discussion. The book is not meant to be an exhaustive treatise on the subject, but the references provide the reader with direction for obtaining information, if desired.

I recall with pleasure the help I received in the preparation of this book. I take this opportunity to thank Dr. Franklin Robinson for his encouragement, helpful suggestions, and invaluable advice; Dr. Orlando Pelliccia, Jr., for his critical review of the manuscript and for his many valuable suggestions; Mrs. Clara Basile, Mrs. Linda DeFrancesco, and Mrs. Gloria Bonci for their unflinching superb secretarial assistance; and Mr. Olivido Gallo and Ms. Doris Barclay for their photographic illustrations. I gratefully acknowledge the encouragement of my mother and the understanding and sacrifices of my wife Ratna and daughter Mytheli. I am appreciative of the help and cooperation of the staff at Springer-Verlag. Finally, I thank all those who have helped me in completing this book, but have remained anonymous.

VENKATACHALA I. SREENIVAS, M.D.

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