

## Book Review

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*Injured Brains of Medical Minds – Views from Within*,  
Narinder Kapur, Oxford University Press, 1997

The patient is always the person on the other side of your desk, isn't it? But: What happens if *you* are the sick woman or man? What is the experience to be brain damaged *yourself*?

The book "Injured Brains of Medical Minds", compiled and edited by Narinder Kapur, gives an extraordinary insight into how brain damage affects the individual life. Narinder Kapur is Consultant Neuropsychologist at the Wessex Neurological Centre and has published widely in the area of memory disorders. Kapur collected about 50 stories written over a period of about 120 years by medical doctors, neuroscientists and psychologists which have themselves suffered a brain injury or a brain disease. They describe their personal experience with stroke, head injury, brain tumor, Parkinsons disease, epilepsy and their coping with the impairment of cognitive functions like memory, speech and vision – providing a unique perspective on areas that are often neglected in common textbooks of neuropsychology and neurology.

The book is very interesting and sometimes even amusing to read. For instance, Karl Lashley, one of the outstanding neuropsychologists of this century, reports in a chapter that his own migraine attack brought about blind spots, elementary visual hallucinations that included scintillating scotoma. Bryan Kolb, a well-known neuropsychologist and author of a standard textbook of neuropsychology describes in another self-report the consequences of his visual field defect due to a stroke as following: *"I still miss capital letters when reading text ... and I am puzzled by the odd spellings or messages. For example a sign stating 'women' can be misread as 'men' or one saying 'telephone' may be misread as 'lephone'(...) I also decided to try skiing that week. I was able to ski without difficulty, although I tended to overcompensate for my field defect and actually ran into a tree in my good field whilst trying to avoid a bush several meters away on the left!"*

In another book-chapter, Prof. Harold Klawans tells us about his colleague, a general surgeon, who suffered from an attack of transient global amnesia during a resection of a gallbladder. Again and again the surgeon asked the nurse: *"Did I take out the gallbladder?"* In contrast to this severe memory deficits he was able to continue in his work without any problems. But, by the time he successfully had finished the operation, he added another fundamental question: *"Where am I?"*

Lawrence Freedman, professor of medicine, suffered a cerebral concussion due to a bicycle accident. He tells us about his anxiety to leave his home and go for a simple walk around the block with his little daughter. Halfway around the block he tried to turn into the wrong direction. He was so absolutely sure to be right, that he bets a million dollar: He still owes this money to his daughter. Stories like this lead the reader to see not only the cognitive deficits, but also the difficulties in activities of daily living and the emotional problems of patients after brain damage.

"Injured Brains of Medical Minds" is not a simple case book. An introduction to each section of the book provides background information to the topic of concern. A commentary accompanying each of the personal accounts puts the papers into the context of current theory and clinical practice, thereby making Narinder Kapur's book a highly recommendable textbook introducing the field of neuropsychology to specialists as well as to non-specialist readers. It is important for everybody who would like to understand not only the theory of a brain lesions but to get an additional touch of the "feeling" how it is to be a brain damaged patient.

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