

## Temporomandibular Disorders: A Clinical Approach (1995)

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British Dental Journal, 64 Great Wimpole Street, London W1N 8AL. Price: UK £16.95 Overseas £26.00  
ISBN:0-904588-44-0

The authors are to be commended for producing this concise and useful book, while the British Dental Journal which published it, also deserves some recognition for doing so.

Historically the management of patients with sign and symptoms attributed to the temporomandibular joint and associated musculature, has been a 'grey area' and one that many dentists preferred to ignore rather than confront. This situation was substantially reflected both in dental curricula and also in the research endeavours of academics. Hence little of relevance was taught and not much serious scientific effort was directed to resolve such problems.

During the last decade or so, and possibly more in some countries than others, there has been increasing interest in conditions under the general rubric of Temporomandibular Disorders. Certainly in the USA due in part to litigation, and possibly in response to the 'business' problem, new 'standards of care' emerged and a proliferating awareness of these conditions has spawned numerous treatment modalities, alternative schools of thought, mutually exclusive 'clinical philosophies', each of which purportedly supported a variety of treatment options. These options range from conservative or reversible, to radical and irreversible procedures.

Unfortunately, most current therapeutic alternatives have strong and enthusiastic proponents but weak evidence to support their effectiveness. This combination is a certain recipe for clinical disagreement and confusion that afflicts dentists to the detriment of patients.

A fundamental problem that impedes scientific resolution of some of the more important questions in this area is that the conditions in

question do not have unambiguous clinical characteristics, and hence lack a usable 'gold standard' necessary for establishing inclusion or exclusion criteria for studies. Nor is it thus possible to determine the sensitivity and specificity of diagnostic tests for identification of the condition and hence for the determination of 'success' versus 'failure' in clinical trials. This also impedes the systematic study of the natural history of various types of these conditions, and thus makes cost benefit analysis studies difficult.

However, in spite of all the hype and some questionable fringe practices, the fact remains that there are patients who do have pain, dysfunction or serious concerns and therefore need to be provided with professional help.

Against the background of such intractable problems, the authors have managed to produce a compendium of useful information aimed at the practising clinician. This concise compendium is lucidly presented, covers all the important aspects from classification, through examination and treatment options, to the indications for specialist referral of the more problematic cases. The clinical information is presented in a refreshingly objective and balanced fashion. There is no indication of a preferred dogma. The cardinal principles espoused throughout are: common sense, individualised patient centred treatment, and the recommendation for conservative policies in preference to irreversible and radical alternatives.

This book can be strongly recommended to practitioners who want a balanced update. It also fills a need in undergraduate and postgraduate dental education.

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