Sleep Medicine
This work is dedicated to the many who suffer from the maladies of sleep, and to those who research and care for those with sleep disorders.

For some must watch, while some must sleep

William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act iii, Scene ii
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Contributors

Irene Aricò
Sleep Medicine Center, Department of Neurosciences, Psychiatric and Anesthesiological Sciences, University of Messina, Messina, Italy

Alon Avidan
Neurology Clinic and Sleep Disorders Center, University of California Los Angeles Department of Neurology, Los Angeles, California, USA

Charles Bae
Sleep Disorders Center, Cleveland Clinic Neurological Institute, Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Paul Christian Baier
Department of Clinical Neurophysiology, Georg-August University Göttingen, Göttingen, Germany

Michel Billiard
Department of Neurology, University of Montpellier, Montpellier, France

Michael A. Cramer Bornemann
Minnesota Regional Sleep Disorders Center, University of Minnesota Medical School, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

M. Isabel Crisostomo
Sleep Disorders Service and Research Center, Department of Behavioral Sciences, Rush University Medical Center, Chicago, Illinois, USA

Antonio Culebras
Upstate Medical University, State University of New York, New York, USA

Ilonka Eisensehr
Department of Neurology, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich, Germany

Christopher D. Fahey
Department of Neurology, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, Chicago, Illinois, USA

Stephany Fulda
Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry, Munich, Germany

Christian Guilleminault
Stanford University Sleep Medicine Program, Stanford, California, USA
List of contributors

Marcel Hungs
Center for Sleep Medicine, University of California Irvine Department of Neurology, Orange, California, USA

Andrea Iaboni
Sleep Disorders Clinic of the Centre for Sleep & Chronobiology, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada

Roberta M. Leu
Department of Pediatrics, Case University School of Medicine, Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital, Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Mark W. Mahowald
Minnesota Regional Sleep Disorders Center, University of Minnesota Medical School, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Geert Mayer
Sleep Disorder Unit, Hephata Klinik, Schwalmstadt-Treysa, Germany

Harvey Moldofsky
Sleep Disorders Clinic of the Centre for Sleep & Chronobiology, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada

Kannan Ramar
Stanford University Sleep Medicine Program, Stanford, California, USA

Carol L. Rosen
Department of Pediatrics, Case University School of Medicine, Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital, Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Carlos H. Schenck
Minnesota Regional Sleep Disorders Center, University of Minnesota Medical School, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Rosalia Silvestri
Sleep Medicine Center, Department of Neurosciences, Psychiatric and Anesthesiological Sciences, University of Messina, Messina, Italy

Harold R. Smith
Center for Sleep Medicine, University of California Irvine School of Medicine, Irvine, California, USA

Claudia Trenkwalder
Paracelsus-Elena-Klinik, Kassel, Germany

Thomas C. Wetter
Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry, Munich, Germany

James K. Wyatt
Sleep Disorders Service and Research Center, Department of Behavioral Sciences, Rush University Medical Center, Chicago, Illinois, USA
List of contributors

Phyllis C. Zee
Department of Neurology, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, Chicago, Illinois, USA

Elisabeth Zils
Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry, Munich, Germany
Sleep in medicine has been important since the days of Hippocrates, when he wrote in Aphorism LXXI: SOMNUS, VIGILIA, UTRAQUE MODUM EXCEDENTIA, MORBUS – Disease exists, if either sleep or watchfulness be excessive. Sleep and its disorders were treated by poets, visionaries, medicine men, healers, psychiatrists – and by a few family physicians who since time immemorial had observed the influence of sleep in physical, mental, and emotional health. And yet, sleep was not established as a scientifically based medical discipline until the middle of the twentieth century, barely fifty years ago. It was the probing of the brain with recently developed EEG techniques that opened the window to the magnificent world of sleep. Searching for the source of dreams, like searching for the fountain of youth in centuries past, led to the discovery of a myriad of disorders that had been unimaginable only a few decades before. Today these conditions are placed in the forefront of medicine. Sleep apnea, restless legs syndrome, the insomnias, the hypersomnias, REM sleep behavior disorder, and so many others have become everyday diagnoses in clinical practice. The disorders of sleep have grown exponentially in complexity. The new International Classification of Sleep Disorders (ICSD-2) incorporates more than 80 recognized sleep diagnoses. To understand and be familiar with so many alterations of human physiology one has to delve into psychology, psychiatry, neurology, pulmonary medicine, cardiology, pediatrics, dentistry, and otorhinolaryngology. Nonetheless, sleep remains a function of the brain, a concept that should not be forgotten when attempting to research the pathophysiology of most sleep maladies.

Complex sleep alterations should be evaluated in the sleep center, because a precise diagnosis will lead to accurate management. And what a difference it makes! How many times have we heard, the morning after titration of a CPAP machine, “Doctor, I have not felt this good in years!”? Or, after the first interview, have alleviated the anxiety of a teenager with delayed sleep phase disorder who was about to be expelled from school? Or have soothed the fears of parents terrified by chilling screams in the middle of the night, proffered by their son with night terrors? And yet the disorders of sleep are not a subject just for the specialist. General practitioners should be well acquainted with the problems of sleep in the same way that they are knowledgeable about classical disorders of daily practice like anemias, heart dysrhythmias, and fainting spells.

It is with this vision of the whole that Dr. Harold Smith, accompanied by Dr. Cynthia Comella and Dr. Birgit Högl, has embarked upon the creation of a book on disorders
of sleep, directed to all who care about human disease. Knowing Dr. Smith's and
his coeditors' tenacity, efficiency, and attention to detail, it goes without saying that
I expect to see the birth of a milestone book in the landscape of treatises devoted to
the subject of sleep.

Antonio Culebras