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978-1-107-54226-6 - Common Pitfalls in the Evaluation and Management of Headache: Case-Based Learning

Elizabeth W. Loder, Rebecca C. Burch and Paul B. Rizzoli

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4843/24, 2nd Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi - 110002, India

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It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107636101

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First published 2014

First South Asia edition 2015

This South Asia edition is based on Elizabeth W. Loder, Rebecca C. Burch and Paul B. Rizzoli / Common Pitfalls in the Evaluation and Management of Headache / 9781107636101 / 2014

Printed in India

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-54226-6 Paperback

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We dedicate this book to the memory of Dr. John Ruskin Graham, an early pioneer in the field of headache medicine and founder of our Headache Center at the Brigham and Women's Faulkner Hospital in Boston. His work and ideals live on at the Graham Headache Center. We strive to uphold Dr. Graham's legacy of kindness, understanding, and expert care for those affected by headache disorders.

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Preface

The *Illustrated Oxford Dictionary* defines a *pitfall* as “an unsuspected snare, danger, or drawback.” This idea of dangers that are disguised or difficult to recognize is reflected in the word’s second meaning, which is a “trap or snare,” often a covered pit, into which unwary animals (or doctors?) might fall. Most doctors correctly realize that evaluation and treatment of headaches can be challenging. They know that most headaches are benign but fear missing the occasional serious cause of headache. Some believe that headache treatment is often unsuccessful and unrewarding.

To the extent that this aversion to headache exists, we think it is unfortunate. In our experience, headache diagnosis is mostly straightforward. Furthermore, headache medicine is often fascinating and gratifying. There are many unusual, intriguing types of headache as well as new and highly effective treatments for headache. We find that even “old-fashioned” treatments, correctly applied, can produce satisfying improvements for the right patient. As with any medical discipline, though, there *are* challenging aspects of headache medicine. Our purpose in writing this book is to make readers aware of the common and less obvious mistakes or pitfalls that we have encountered during our years in practice – as well as those we have observed in the practices of others.

There are many case-based neurology books available to practitioners who are interested in head pain, including several with an exclusive focus on headache.

This book differs from those in two ways. First, the cases in this book focus solely on challenging rather than routine aspects of headache diagnosis and treatment. Second, this book was written while the International Classification of Headache Disorders (ICHD) was being updated for just the third time since it was issued in 1988. As a result, all of the information in this book is current with the just-released ICHD-3 beta version of the classification. The ICHD-3 beta is available free of charge at the website of the International Headache Society (<http://www.ihs-headache.org>); you may wish to print it for easy reference while reading this book. We have not reproduced the diagnostic criteria verbatim but have instead summarized the clinical characteristics of each disorder, as specified in the latest version of the classification.

Among us, the three authors of this book have a combined experience of full-time Headache Medicine practice of almost half a century. PR and EL are seasoned veterans and bring many years of clinical experience to bear. In contrast, RB is in the early phase of her career; she has helped us focus on pitfalls and mistakes to which newcomers or non-headache specialists might be prone. We hope these dual perspectives make this a book that is useful to anyone who might see headache patients, from family practitioners to pain specialists. After all, who among us has so much experience that s/he cannot learn from the mistakes and near misses of others?

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Acknowledgements

We offer our sincere thanks to Dr. Martin Samuels, the legendary and beloved chairman of the Department of Neurology at the Brigham and Women's and Brigham and Women's Faulkner Hospitals in Boston. His vision and backing led to the formation of the Division of Headache within the Brigham Department of Neurology – one of the first such divisions to be created within the Neurology Department of a leading US academic medical center. The Graham Headache Center, and by extension this book, would not exist without him.

We also thank Nicholas Dunton, our editor at Cambridge University Press, for inviting us to write

this book. He tolerated with good humor the delay caused by the tardy release of the third version of the International Classification of Headache Disorders. We hope he feels the result was worth the wait! Our thanks also go to Kirsten Bot, assistant editor and publishing assistant, who was so helpful with the final phases of the book's production. We also thank our copy-editor, Anne Kenton, for her keen eye and attention to detail.

Elizabeth Loder, Rebecca Burch, Paul Rizzoli
July 2013