Autonomic Failure
A Textbook of Clinical Disorders of the Autonomic Nervous System

SECOND EDITION

Edited by
SIR ROGER BANNISTER
Master, Pembroke College, Oxford;
Consultant Physician, National Hospital for Nervous Diseases, London; Hon. Consultant Neurologist, St. Mary's Hospital, London,
Oxford District Health Authority, and Oxford Regional Health Authority

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Preface to the second edition

The second edition aims to provide a comprehensive scientific basis for diagnosis and treatment of the wide range of autonomic disorders which are now being recognized with increasing frequency. It describes these disorders in general diseases such as diabetes and alcoholism as well as in various syndromes of acute, sub-acute, and chronic autonomic failure. Since the first edition there have been many advances in the subject and these have necessitated extensive revision; new chapters have been added on sexual and bladder function, the gut, fainting, cardiac arrhythmias, pain syndromes, sweating disturbances, and porphyria.

In the five years since the first edition many more autonomic investigation units have been set up around the world and this increases the need for methods of testing which can be accepted as comparable internationally. The international approach in this book is helped by the fact that, among the 30 new authors, 14 are from outside Britain, 10 of them from North America. Also a new chapter has been added comparing patients in Britain and in the United States. The standard physiological tests of autonomic function are supplemented in this edition by a wide range of new biochemical, pharmacological, and hormonal tests of autonomic function. These tests are both complex and time-consuming and so the indications for undertaking them need to be clearly described.

Since the last edition there have been rapid advances in the basic science of autonomic transmission, with discovery of many peptides which act as co-transmitters or modulators of transmission. An increasing number of peptides, hormones, and enzymes can now be assayed in man and this has led to the recognition of new causes of disordered autonomic function, such as congenital dopamine-beta-hydroxylase deficiency. Progress in neuropeptide chemistry has been matched by progress in immunocytochemical staining, electron microscopic studies of the ganglia, and fibre counting techniques, all of which give greater precision in pathological diagnosis. Magnetic resonance imaging, positron emission tomography, brainstem evoked potentials, and microneurography are some of the other promising investigative techniques that are described in this edition.

Better treatment rests on the attempt to bridge the gap between basic neuroscience and clinical medicine, so making diagnosis and treatment increasingly precise. It is hoped that this new edition will continue to provide physicians in different fields, including neurology, diabetology,
Cardiology, geriatrics, and general medicine, with a rational guide to management.

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R. B.

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