

THE DIAGNOSTIC SIGNIFICANCE OF PAIN IN THE BACK.

BY

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The diagnostic value of localized pain in the back, and the frequency with which systematic examination of that region is over-looked, are reasons for laying before you some points which have impressed me during the past year.

The material has been drawn from the clinic of the Royal Victoria Hospital, and from its variety presents certain difficulties to anything like proper classification. In chronic cases the old maxim of "expose the back," and this means from the occiput to the sacrum, must be observed. By this method alone can the examiner fully satisfy himself.

It might be well here to mention the popular superstition that pain in the back, especially if it is anywhere around the lumbar region, must mean diseased kidneys. If one goes over the history of patients suffering from Bright's disease, from stone in the kidney, or from septic infection of the kidney, it is surprising to note how few cases, if any, have pain in the back; that is to say, pain referred to the vertebral column. In most of these cases the pain is a dull ache or soreness referred to the lumbar region, and in the case of colic it is usually referred along a definite path. So, also, the number of cases of pain in the back, popularly referred to some displacement of the pelvic viscera, is far too great to have any definite scientific reason for localizing the cause in that region, and the proof of this lies in the fact that so many of the leading gynaecologists of the day are very conservative in their operating on this class of cases.

The back ache so often met with in people of sedentary habits, especially women, and which can be directly traced to chronic constipation, I would just mention. But these various popular causes of back ache are very general, and I would like to bring to your attention certain localized facts with regard to pain in the vertebral column.

It must be remembered that referred pain is so frequent in organic disease of the vertebral column that the origin of intractable pain referred to any area supplied by spinal nerves, may frequently be discovered by thorough examination of the spinal column at the level of the nerve root. The method of the examination is simple. The patient, being stripped from occiput to sacrum, has the back thoroughly exposed to a good light; the vertical symmetry of the column is noted, as also the