Not another textbook for neuropathology! Yes, we hear you and feel your pain. In fact, that was our initial response when we were approached to write the book you are now holding. In surveying the expanse of currently available neuropathology textbooks, we felt there was a place for a book that could combine our career experiences of trying to discern what is known (and knowable) with the perennially proposed question, “What do we need to know?” Together we tried to produce a book that would be practical, understandable, and to the point (minimizing reading time during intraoperative consultation). We have concentrated our efforts on elucidating important neuropathologic entities that fall outside of general surgical pathologic practice. Conversely, we have given short shrift to disease entities falling well within the purview of the general surgical pathologist, but which also tend to involve the nervous system. Despite using this mental targeting to bring coherence and a sense of purpose to our writing, we believe this book will also prove helpful to pathology, radiology, and neurosurgery residents and staff as well as to others interested in a practical histopathologic approach to neurosurgical diseases.

We have found that much of the anxiety related to surgical pathology revolves around several major themes:

1. It is generally believed that though one can do without much of one’s liver or colon, every neuron counts. Therefore, we are sometimes asked to make very big diagnoses on very small amounts of tissue.

2. This request usually comes as an intraoperative consultation, where time is of the essence, and technical aspects of the preparations may be less than ideal.

3. Everything looks pink.

Our publishers helped us with this last problem by insisting on black and white photographs. We initially protested, noting that many recent textbook reviews seemed to be primarily guided by whether illustrations were in color (good) or black and white (bad). However, upon further reflection we accepted this mandate as a blessing in disguise, allowing the reader to focus on differences in morphology, rather than tincture, as a guide to correct diagnosis. In fact, one of us (M.C.) has always been a fan of black and white photography, both in histologic atlases as well as in the immortal photographs of artists ranging from Ansel Adams to Diane Arbus. Within this framework, we have attempted to produce a user-friendly guide to the exciting world of neuropathologic diagnosis. Although Chapter 1 covers intraoperative neurosurgical diagnosis in general, we never strayed far from the frozen section room, either in body or in spirit, as we attempted to elucidate the neuropathologic entities comprising the remainder of the book. Though we realize that it is neither possible nor desirable to remove all anxiety from surgical neuropathologic diagnosis (after all, it is brain surgery), we hope that Practical Differential Diagnosis in Surgical Neuropathology will help focus the reader’s energy toward optimizing our common goal: the care of the patient.

Special thanks to Denise Egleton and Marilyn Taylor for their help in the preparation of this manuscript. Thanks also to Dr. Kymberly Gyure for supplying figures.

Richard A. Prayson, MD
Mark L. Cohen, MD
Practical Differential Diagnosis in Surgical Neuropathology
Prayson, R.A.; Cohen, M.L.
2000, VIII, 179 p., Hardcover
A product of Humana Press