CHAPTER

Foreword

The most important prognostic factor in cancers of the head and neck is the status of cervical lymph nodes. The importance of cervical lymph-node metastasis in the management of cancers of the head and neck was reported as early as 1847 by Chelius. Kocher, in the same year, proposed the need to surgically excise these “glands” in the treatment of oral cancer. At the turn of the 19th century, Butlin emphasized the need to excise upper cervical lymph nodes in the surgical treatment of tongue cancer. However, the credit for systematic excision of cervical lymph nodes in the surgical treatment of cancers of the head and neck should go to George Crile, Sr., who described the operation of “radical neck dissection,” based on his personal experience, in 1906. Hayes Martin popularized the operation and established it as the standard of surgical care for cervical lymph-node metastasis. Although the operation was effective and considered the gold standard, it also caused significant esthetic and functional morbidity.

The authors of this book are to be complimented for putting together an excellent text on the evolution of the philosophy of surgical management of cervical lymph-node metastasis. The concept of cervical lymphatics contained within the fascial compartments of the neck, initially developed and applied to surgical techniques by Osvaldo Suárez, is appropriately credited. Subsequent promulgation of his technique in Europe by Bocca and Gavilán led to the accumulation of significant surgical experience, particularly in cancers of the larynx, to justify the validity of the concept and its surgical application with convincing outcomes. The authors propose “functional neck dissection” as a concept and not a modification of the standard radical neck dissection. To that end, the historical perspective detailed in this textbook is impressive.

Understanding of the patterns of cervical lymph-node metastasis has further advanced the “concept” of functional neck dissection to the development and clinical applicability of selective neck dissections. Thus, the varieties of selective neck dissections currently in vogue are called extensions of the concept of functional neck dissection, as proposed in this book.

The authors are to be commended for putting together a fine contribution to the literature in the field of head and neck oncology. This book is a classic tour through the history of surgical management of neck metastasis and is a meticulous and outstanding treatise on the technical aspects of the operation. The years of experience amassed by the authors is reflected in the chapter Hints and Pitfalls.

This opus from the surgical dynasty of the Gaviláns, enriched by contributions from DeSanto and Herranz, is truly a monumental work on the history, development, practice, and outcomes of functional neck dissection.

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Preface

The present book represents the philosophy of neck dissection used by the authors based on their experience over a period of more than 30 years. It also describes the evolution of neck dissection during the 20th century, from George Crile to the surgery of the new millennium. And last but not least, it relates the transition from radical neck dissection to other less aggressive, but equally effective, procedures, which have been designed to manage the neck in patients with head and neck cancer.

The relation between functional neck dissection and selective neck dissection is approached from a pragmatic nonconventional perspective, which does not always follow the guidelines of the classifications currently used in the literature. However, by no means should this book be regarded as a proposal for a new classification of neck dissection. In reality, there is not even a chapter dedicated to the issue of neck dissection classification. Our main purpose is to clarify the connection between functional and selective neck dissection from historical, anatomic, and surgical standpoints. However, rest assured that this book is not limited to the history and philosophy of neck dissection; surgical technique constitutes a fundamental part of this volume. Surgical details are extensively demonstrated with sequential operative photographs of actual operations performed by the authors. Where necessary, line drawings are used to complement the details of the surgical field. The number of illustrations reflects the detail of the description provided.

A separate chapter on “hints and pitfalls” has been designed to provide the reader with technical guides and warnings that reflect the personal experience of the authors acquired through decades of practice. They are shared here to avoid repetition of previous mistakes. Many years ago, when I was in training, I learned from Antonio de la Cruz, M D, that to make science move forward you must be original in your own errors — that is the reason for this chapter.

Over the last 10 years we have been lecturing on neck dissection around the world. This has provided us with rich input from a variety of audiences concerning the most frequent doubts, problems, and demands regarding the various surgical techniques that are currently available. A separate chapter has been designed to answer the most frequently asked questions and to thereby make available to the reader a somehow more direct communication with the authors.

The conceptual approach to functional and selective neck dissection, the surgical indications for these procedures, and the operative technique demonstrated in this book express the ideas and opinions of the authors — a very small group of persons. Thus, the book should be regarded as a single-author work rather than as a multiauthored volume. Whereas there are many advocates for multiauthored books — as proven by their widespread diffusion in recent years — the clarity and uniform methodology of a surgical concept does not develop in a multiauthored book. To that extent, there is an obvious advantage in following the approach developed by one individual — or a small uniform group of experts — with years of authority in the field.

This book is primarily addressed to practicing head and neck surgeons involved in the management of malignant tumors. However, surgeons training in otorhinolaryngology, general surgery, or plastic surgery will also find it an interesting and valuable source of information. The
graphic information included in the book will serve as a highly useful tool to familiarize readers with the procedure.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts and dedication of the coauthors of this book. My thanks go first to César Gavilán, MD, my father, teacher, and faithful fellow for many years. He has contributed like any other person to my knowledge and experience, both in the personal and in the professional field. I would also like to thank Lawrence W. DeSanto, MD, for helping me so much and opening so many doors to my professional expansion in the international arena. This book is one of the examples of Larry’s help during the last decade. Thanks also go to my good friend Jesús Herranz, MD. Over the years we have shared many hours of courses, discussions, and thoughts, which have culminated in this book. His energetic working capacity and critical compliance have been indispensable in the completion of this work.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to those who have helped with this book. Julio García-Polo, MD, did a fine job with many of the photographs; Ricardo Bernáldez, MD, and Antonio del Palacio, MD, suffered long surgical sessions to obtain the adequate surgical images for the book; and María Angeles Cerdeira, MD, and Roberto Fernández worked hard on the illustrations. I also have to acknowledge the dedicated help of the fellows, residents, and nursing staff in the Department of Otolaryngology at La Paz University Hospital and La Zarzuela Hospital for their support and assistance with the clinical and surgical work associated with this book. My special thanks go to Carmen Marina, my secretary, who has been particularly helpful during the last weeks of final preparation when everything seemed to be “almost done.”

My final thanks go to those who remain at home when I go to work and those who remain at the hospital when I come back home. My family and my patients are the two vital forces of my life. For many years my wife, Mercedes, and my children, Cristina and Jaime, have suffered my egoistic professional interest. I know this situation will probably continue for a long time and would like to thank them for their love and support over the years. Meanwhile, my patients will occupy most of my time. Trying to cure them and improve their quality of life will remain as the unreachable utopia that I will always seek.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that this book was written with the intention to clarify concepts and approximate postures in the controversial and sometimes contentious field of neck dissection. As often happens with conciliatory postures, the final result may be worse than the original situation. However, we assume the risk with the hope that the synthesizing approach to neck dissection that is given in this book may shed some light upon the field.

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