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Preface

Generally speaking, a workshop is an institution which provides the means of presenting brand-new findings and preliminary data; it is the place where rough conceptions and tentative hypotheses are put forward and discussed, are rejected or supported. Thus, the publication of the proceedings of a workshop is not only an unusual procedure, but highly undesirable because the printed word is hardly compatible with improvisation and incompleteness. Incomplete to a high degree is also our knowledge of two otologic entities, the sudden hearing loss and the acute vestibular neuropathy. In spite of their frequent confrontation with patients, both the otologist and the audio-neurootologist feel urged by their ignorance concerning etiology and empirical therapy. Only one fact has emerged from the darkness: These are not two homogeneous diseases but are symptoms of totally different origin. That may be vascular disturbances, viral infections, otosclerosis or the acoustic neuroma. Accordingly, very different forms of treatment are required. In this situation, it was the aim of the 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutscher Audiologen und Neurootologen' to bring related disciplines into cooperation in order to refer to their latest knowledge of diagnostical techniques and pharmacotherapy, and the editors are grateful to those who have communicated open-minded with an adjacent specialty. It was, of course, impossible to treat all aspects comprehensively. But we ended up with quite a view remarkable contributions which was the stimulus to publish the collected contributions on the general theme. Despite some basic and more comprehensive articles, this volume still exhibits a touch of workshop character because all pertinent free papers which were presented have also been included.

Preface VIII

I am hopeful that the findings published here may promote the understanding of disorders of cochlear function, may serve to restrict the use of the term 'sudden hearing loss' unequivocally to cochlear events, and may stimulate further progress in clinical and basic research.

The editors
A disease has a history of its own. Up to a certain moment it does
not exist. Then somebody discovers it and gives it a name. Thus it is born.
Afterwards it tends to crop up everywhere, and reports are published on
increasing numbers of observations. Each author is eager to add further
details to complete the description. After a while everybody is familiar
with it, it appears in the textbooks and even in popular magazines. The
disease is established in the medical system, and hardly anybody remembers
that it was not there before.
In this late phase the disease is bound to split up. Somebody will find
out that it is not a disease of its own after all, but that it comprises a number
of diseases which must be differentiated from various points of view.
Thus, a second generation of related diseases is born.
This development, of course, only reflects the historical relationship
between nature and our understanding of it. Sudden deafness is such a disease
and has such a history. Before 1944 it was practically unknown; nowadays
everybody seems to know what it is. But do we know? Is it a disease
of its own? Is it bound to split up?
At the Symposium of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutscher Audiologen
und Neurootologen, held at Erlangen, West Germany, in March 1980,
sudden deafness was one of the main topics. The corresponding articles
are published here. They summarize some aspects of this mysterious disease.

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