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Switzerland, a model country in so many ways, is also a model laboratory for studying injuries related to skiing. Though certainly not the only nation with a claim on Alpine terrain, Switzerland is more greatly dependent on the tourist industry than are France, Italy, Austria, and Germany. In certain Alpine areas of Switzerland, tourism may account for up to 80% of the economy. In this sense, snow is an important national resource, and skiing, apart from ranking as the nation's favorite sport, is an industry that has been cultivated with characteristic Swiss efficiency. Not surprisingly, Swiss ski resorts are known for their superior facilities,
lift equipment, and slope conditions as well as for their outstanding scenery and the famous personalities frequently photographed there. The country is thus ideally styled for an `industrialized' recreational sport that depends on sophisticated personal equipment and well-organized transport installations, goes through fashions, and carries, as part of its popular appeal, an association of healthy physical exertion with an evening of relaxing in luxury.

In the past decade, these very attractions have created a serious problem in skiing because the number of serious and fatal head accidents linked to this sport has increased to an alarming degree in Switzerland itself and in every other country with facilities for downhill skiing.

This monograph, focused on head injuries and based on more than 10 years of experience in the Department of Neurosurgery at the Cantonal Hospital of Chur (Graubunden), documents the severity of accidents associated with skiing and explores their causes, covering both the obvious and some unexpected dangers of this sport.

For such a project, Switzerland has again served as a good model: the small geographic area of this country combined with its dense population of locals and tourists makes it possible for a neurosurgical department, such as ours, to gather experience and statistics on a sufficient scale to permit some generalizations.

Preface VIII

As the record of cases seen and treated by us clearly shows, even the best and most immediate medical treatment of the head injuries is not always adequate to save the accident victim or prevent life-long handicaps. Head injuries in skiing are serious mostly, and increasing in frequency nowadays. It is for these reasons that strategies for prevention have been kept at the forefront of concern throughout this work.

Chur, January 1985 S.O.