

**REM** REM: A PUBLICATION FOR RESIDENTS AND FELLOWS

## MEDIA REVIEW: *Sleepyhead: The Neuroscience of a Good Night's Rest* by Henry Nicholls

Richard Byrne, MD; Jennifer L. Marsella, MD

Department of Neurology, University of Rochester Medical Center, Sleep Disorders Center, Rochester, New York

Henry Nicholls' *Sleepyhead: The Neuroscience of a Good Night's Rest*, published by Basic Books in 2018, is an intriguing book that reads quickly, unlike a textbook, yet imparts the reader with general knowledge of various sleep disorders.

**Keywords:** neuroscience, sleep disorders

**Citation:** Byrne R, Marsella JL. *Sleepyhead: The Neuroscience of a Good Night's Rest* by Henry Nicholls. *J Clin Sleep Med*. 2019;15(1):169.

Henry Nicholls' *Sleepyhead: The Neuroscience of a Good Night's Rest*, is an intriguing book that reads quickly, unlike a textbook, yet imparts the reader with general knowledge of various sleep disorders. The book is widely available through several major book resellers, and it is published by Basic Books.

Mr. Nicholls is a science journalist with a personal interest in sleep due to his own history of narcolepsy. As he states in the first few pages, the book is not meant to be a self-help book. Instead, it is written for those looking to learn more generally about sleep and the various sleep disorders. Given his personal experience with narcolepsy, it is not surprising that he spends most of the time discussing narcolepsy and its symptoms, but chapters that cover other sleep disorders are included as well. Fortunately, he does not plainly describe diagnostic criteria for these disorders, but he makes the scientific topics digestible by referencing symptoms of historical figures and describing the history of how several of these disorders were discovered. He briefly describes treatment, although this is not the focus as he did not intend for it to be a reference text for therapeutic intervention.

The information contained in the book is largely accurate with few exceptions and likely will not precipitate angry emails from sleep specialists. One point of contention is the interpretation of a Multiple Sleep Latency Test. He writes "SOREMPs in two out of the five trials is considered diagnostic of narcolepsy." While multiple sleep-onset REM periods (SOREMPs) are certainly part of the narcolepsy diagnosis, he does not indicate that there may be other causes of multiple SOREMPs and that they may even be found in a normal population.<sup>1</sup> Another point that he does not clearly delineate, which arguably may not be important for his audience, is the difference between narcolepsy type 1 (with cataplexy) and narcolepsy type 2 (without cataplexy). He generalizes that the cause of narcolepsy is a deficiency in hypocretin, without explaining that the majority of patients with narcolepsy type 2 do not have a measurable hypocretin deficiency.<sup>1</sup> Overall, the need to identify this distinction for the lay audience is minimal.

Most readers will enjoy this book. Of note are the author's inclusion of interesting historical anecdotes and less conventional treatments, such as playing the didgeridoo to improve obstructive sleep apnea. From a clinician's standpoint, reading books from a patient's perspective can be helpful to reinvigorate empathy for the patient's difficulties navigating the health care system. One caution about this book is that some readers may feel they are not getting their money's worth because a significant portion (63 pages) are references with brief notes and the index. Other readers may find the references useful.

In summary, *Sleepyhead: The Neuroscience of a Good Night's Rest*, is an easy to read overview of a large majority of sleep disorders that maintains the reader's attention by discussing the historical aspects of the disorders and by linking anecdotal symptoms recorded by historical figures with current medical understanding. Patients and family members who are looking for a general overview of sleep disorders, and even clinicians, are likely to find it enjoyable and educational.

### REFERENCES

1. Andlauer O, Moore H, Hong S, et al. Predictors of hypocretin deficiency in narcolepsy without cataplexy. *Sleep*. 2012;35(9):1247-1255.

### SUBMISSION & CORRESPONDENCE INFORMATION

Submitted for publication October 30, 2018

Submitted in final revised form October 30, 2018

Accepted for publication November 2, 2018

Address correspondence to: Richard Byrne, MD, 1561 Elmwood Ave, Apt 5, Rochester, NY 14620; Tel: (908) 227-1679; Email: Richard\_Byrne@URMC.Rochester.edu

### DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors have seen and approved the manuscript. The authors report no conflicts of interest.