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Roald Dahl's marvellous medicine

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BOOK REVIEW**Roald Dahl's marvellous medicine**, by Tom Solomon, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2016, pp. 253

Readers may be surprised to find this book reviewed in Neuropsychological Rehabilitation but, fear not as it contains some descriptions very appropriate for neuropsychology and neuropsychological rehabilitation, as well as being a joy to read. Tom Solomon, a distinguished neurologist and chair of the scientific committee of the Encephalitis Society, knew and treated Roald Dahl when he (Solomon) was a junior doctor at the John Radcliffe hospital in Oxford. We all know Roald Dahl the author, but few know of Dahl's fascination with medicine, which lasted throughout his life. Dahl, himself, who wanted to be a doctor, was the survivor of a plane crash in world war two; his treasured oldest daughter, Olivia, died from measles encephalitis at the age of seven; his son, Theo was involved in a car crash as a baby and suffered from hydrocephalus; his first wife, the actress Patricia Neal, had a stroke at the age of 39; and his step daughter died from a non-malignant brain tumour. Dahl was no stranger to neurological illness!

Because of Theo's recurring hydrocephalus, Dahl was determined to find a solution and was crucial in developing a particular kind of shunt to solve the problem. This was the Wade-Dahl-Till (WDT) valve as described in the Lancet in 1964. His wife's stroke resulted in a programme of intensive rehabilitation and was a key factor in the formation of the Stroke Association. It foretold many of the rehabilitation strategies for stroke patients today and is not dissimilar to constraint-induced therapy which was developed many years later. Because appropriate rehabilitation was not available when Patricia Neal had her stroke, Dahl organised a rota of friends to come in each day and provide rigorous stimulation and teaching. This was so successful that Neal was able to make films again. One of the volunteers was Valerie Eaton Griffiths who became an "expert" and wrote about rehabilitation of stroke survivors. The WDT valve, the intensive stroke rehabilitation programme and many other aspects of Dahl's marvellous medicine are explained in the book. We are told about Solomon and Dahl's late night conversations in the hospital followed by spin offs into various aspects of medicine. Solomon speculates that Dahl's creativity may have been enhanced by mild frontal lobe damage caused by the plane crash. Patricia Neal had more obvious frontal lobe damage as she became quite disinhibited once she had "recovered".

This book is a delight to read and at times will bring you to tears: for example, when we hear about Olivia's unexpected death and its effect on Dahl. At other times the book will make you laugh out loud: for example, when we hear about the "golden age of chocolate". Solomon has just explained to Dahl about the golden age of vaccines and the golden age of microbiology when Dahl mentioned the golden age of chocolate (apparently nearly all of our favourite chocolate bars were invented in the 1930s). Solomon's affection and respect for Roald Dahl, shine through. Dahl died at the John Radcliffe Hospital soon after Solomon's last visit to him. This is a special and heartwarming book, full

of incident, highly readable and informative. Although not your typical neuropsychological rehabilitation book reviewed in these pages, I can almost guarantee you will enjoy it and learn not only about Dahl's writings but also about his contribution to medicine and to rehabilitation.

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