Should I be asked what Controversies in Pediatric Neurosurgery conveys to the reader, my answer would be a sense of freedom. Aside from independently deriving different ways to approach a given pathologic condition, this sensation of freedom is also generated by the editors’ willingness to deny a predetermined conclusion or appropriate answer for each given controversy. Consequently, most of the information is provided in a sort of colloquial way among friends aimed at achieving a unified purpose, rather than a debate of opposing absolutes and incompatible truths. Additionally, the “Lessons Learned” by the editors at the end of each chapter tend to mediate the positions of the contributing authors and likewise individuate the essential points of discussion. Obviously, the intention is to offer the reader a convergent view, rather than to accentuate the dubious.

Generally, one of the main limits and risks a multiauthored volume may suffer from is a quality of unevenness among the various chapters. In many of these cases, editors propend to offer a somewhat rigid scheme for their contributors to adhere to in order to make their book as uniform as possible. This book is unique in that it is evident that the authors enjoyed the opportunity to employ their own style when delivering their message or sharing their personal experience. The lack of a dogmatic attitude by both the editors and the authors amounts to a very readable book with a surprisingly agile architecture apt for conveying and updating information effectively.

The readability of this book is further enhanced by the authors’ and editors’ shared understanding that an attitude of assured knowledge must be renounced when addressing these controversies, avoiding contraposition, and emphasizing the reasons for the multifaceted approaches often required to treat pediatric neurosurgical conditions. Occasionally, as in the excellent contribution by Albright in Chapter 19, it is expressly declared that the will to avoid considering controversial therapeutic approaches must be challenged in the interest of delivering the best possible care.

The editors have chosen 20 controversial subjects that cover the spectrum of pediatric neurosurgery, including disorders of cerebrospinal fluid dynamics, congenital cranial and spinal malformations, tumors, vascular congenital and acquired disorders, intracranial infections, and intractable epilepsy. These topics certainly belong to those areas of pediatric neurosurgery where treatments still bring doubt and discussion. However, after reading this book, one may wonder whether the essential core of pediatric neurosurgery, or even the entire discipline, should be thought of as controversial, as physiopathogenetic interpretation remains obscure. A controversial spirit could argue that other similarly debated pediatric neurosurgical subjects were not covered. However, considering the excellence of this work as it stands, even such a critic would be compelled to admit that the field might demand a second volume by the same editors, covering the remaining nosographic entities of pediatric neurosurgery whose pathogenesis, not to mention treatment, is quite debatable.

Over the years, controversy has arisen over the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing the specialty of pediatric neurosurgery in comparison with that of general neurosurgery. Almost always, this debate is solicited by general neurosurgeons and might have comprised the first chapter of the book, but luckily we were spared such a fruitless discussion. Indeed, pediatric neurosurgeons appear to have a firm appreciation for the element of controversy inherent in their discipline and do not feel a need to seek some kind of legitimization of purpose. The controversies in pediatric neurosurgery, such as those dealt with in this interesting book, demonstrate unequivocally how open
the field is to young and curious minds eager to further develop the specialty. In this respect, the editors should be praised for having chosen to challenge themselves by facing unsolved problems with a flexible discernment, rather than conforming to the status quo by working in a field where the knowledge is already well established, its principles fully accepted.

Concezio Di Rocco
Rome
Knowledge is a process of piling up facts; wisdom lies in their simplification.

—Martin H. Fischer

Considerable numbers of conditions in pediatric neurosurgery are approached in various ways throughout the world. These different treatment modalities are greatly dependent upon surgical training and experience, location in the world, and available resources. Due to the relatively small numbers of cases and the lack of studies providing hard evidence, considerable debate exists regarding the “correct” way of treating such conditions. The diverse algorithms that pediatric neurosurgeons use to approach patients with Chiari I malformations and tethered cords are perennial subjects of such debate. How aggressive the surgical resection of craniopharyngiomas and ependymomas ought to be is another. We have attempted to address these controversies by inviting opinion leaders in their respective fields to provide their points of view based on the best evidence and the most extensive experience to date. The authors were entirely free to express their viewpoint, while the editors summarized their points in the “Lessons Learned” sections following each subject of controversy, sometimes taking sides, sometimes just framing the open questions, as they remain open.

This book is intended to expose readers to the various strategies available and to assist practitioners in their discussions with patients and their families in an unbiased manner. The book is divided into two sections, intracranial and intraspinal disease processes. We hope that this textbook will serve as a reference with its diverse opinions and approaches for all pediatric neurosurgical diseases. Furthermore, we hope that the “controversies” addressed here will allow us to expand our knowledge and understanding of these conditions.

We are grateful to all contributors for their efforts. Our thanks extend to the editorial team of Kay Conerly, Dominik Pucek, Ivy Ip, and Emma Lassiter at Thieme Medical Publishers for their patience and dedication to the project.