**Brain Stem Encephalitis**

The brain could be regarded as being in three parts. The brain stem is the most primitive part and supports the most basic functions of breathing, blood circulation and digestion. It is also involved in some of the basic aspects of behaviour, mating, aggression and anger. It sits above the spinal cord at the base of the rest of the brain.

Probably the greatest practical challenge facing the physician is the maintenance of vital functions in the acute stage of brainstem encephalitis. With the present capacity of physiologic support and close observation offered by intensive care units, such patients may be tided over the acute phase. Many cases of apparently devastating brainstem encephalitis recover significantly if supported through the acute phase. Yet others will survive with devastating disability remaining in a “locked-in” state.

Long term damage to any area of the brainstem will result in problems that are associated with that area. Examples include problems with temperature control, digestion and anger management.