

Being Mortal: Illness, Medicine and What Matters in the End

Atul Gawande
Profile Books 2014
Price £15.99. Pp 288
ISBN 978 1 84668 581 1

Atul Gawande is a general surgeon, eminent author and was senior advisor to the US Department of Health and Human Services. Reading this book, he is also clearly a man full of compassion and empathy who draws on his personal experiences and those as a surgeon to explore ageing and dying in his new book *Being Mortal*.

Gawande first discusses what it means to be elderly in modern society. He uses personal reflection, amusing anecdotes and the experiences of individuals to provide intelligent and witty insights into how ageing affects individuals and their families. He then moves on to explore the

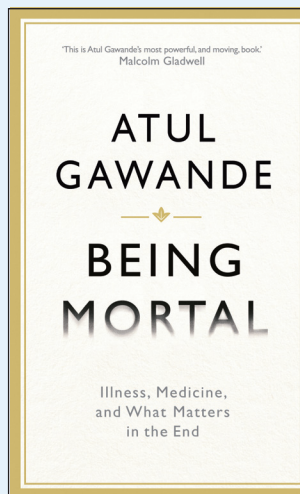
medicalization of death and how medical advancements have made it increasingly difficult to decide when to stop treatment and accept that somebody is dying.

As a foundation doctor, these issues are ones which I have already faced on numerous occasions. The first, when trying to arrange discharge plans for elderly patients and the second when asked to see patients who are dying but still being actively treated. Gawande's book has helped me see these issues with a new perspective. For example, his observation that the elderly tend to prioritize freedom while we prioritize their safety explains how care homes which we view as being safe and

secure are often seen by the residents as being overly restrictive.

While this book by no means provides all the answers, it does help us to reflect on these complex and emotional issues. Far from being depressing, I found this book to be an inspiring account of society's changing attitudes towards ageing and death, and the consequences for future generations. Ultimately, this book has the potential to sow the seed for radical structural changes within our health- and social-care systems, which could benefit us all in the years to come.

Emily Maile, Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust, Northampton



Oxford Desk Reference: Toxicology

Edited by Nick Bateman,
Robert Jefferson, Simon Thomas,
John Thompson, Allister Vale
Oxford University Press 2014
Price £55.00. Pp 432
ISBN 978 0 19 959474 0

The Oxford Desk Reference on Toxicology, is a new addition to this series of texts. Its stated purpose is to be a 'source document for the theoretical and practical aspects of clinical toxicology', and it certainly achieves its goal. Authors include leaders in the field, including staff (past and present) from the National Poisons Information Service.

The book is well structured, starting with three useful, general chapters; scientific principles in clinical toxicology, general management of the poisoned patient and common complications of poisoning. Subsequent chapters encompass well-defined groups of toxins including prescribed drugs (CNS, analgesics, cardiovascular and 'other'), drugs of abuse, chemicals, metals and their salts, household products and pesticides. Also includ-

ed are sections on chemical warfare agents and radiation. This breadth justifies its use as a comprehensive reference.

Within each section, individual drugs are presented in a succinct but informative manner, usually encompassing two sides (more common poisons such as paracetamol are covered in greater depth). Each of the drug summaries includes information about toxic doses, mechanisms of toxicity, toxicokinetics and risk factors for toxicity. The clinical content covers assessment, investigation and management. Each section is supplied with a useful list of articles for further reading. However, the style is functional and illustrations are sparse and in black and white which makes the text less approachable to the casual reader.

The book would be of value to all those with an interest in clinical toxicology – particularly those in clinical pharmacology, acute medicine, intensive care and emergency medicine. Those working in emergency medicine, who manage overdose on a daily basis, will find such a reference volume particularly useful. The book cannot be used as an alternative to TOXBASE – the clinical

toxicology database of the National Poisons Information Service – which gives more detailed advice on management, but rather should be viewed as a valuable adjunct.

Marc George, UCL Hospitals, London

The Complete Recovery Room Book (5th edition)

Anthea Hatfield
Oxford University Press 2014
Price £24.99. Pp 240
ISBN 978 0 19 967060 4

This book provides all the knowledge needed to manage patients in the post-surgical recovery period. Basic principles are clearly explained. The clinical application of these principles is then covered in each chapter.

A comprehensive list of topics provides a concrete guide to managing the diverse range of post-surgical patients encountered within modern health care. The text is easy reading and well written, providing a logical framework for troubleshooting in the recovery room. Headings and chapters are set out for easy navigation. This book is great as a reference guide or for reading back to front.

This is an essential read for practitioners and nurses working in the recovery room.
Mark Dodd, Chesterfield Royal Hospital, Chesterfield

