

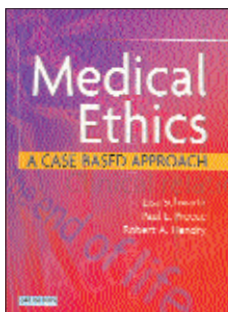
Medical Ethics: a case based approach

Lisa Schwartz, Paul E Preece, Robert A Hendry
WB Saunders 2002
Price £15.99. Pp 204
ISBN 0702025437

The teaching of medical ethics is, rightly, moving up the educational agenda. Increasingly difficult ethical dilemmas are common in the everyday practice of most doctors. Easy to read textbooks are necessary both for students but also as a reference resource for practising doctors.

This book is certainly easy to read. However, the title is a little misleading and the book is less easy to use as a reference than expected. It is very UK-focused; while this is perhaps inevitable there is little on how those from different religious and cultural backgrounds may approach ethical problems.

Overall the book discusses difficult dilemmas in a balanced, clear and easily readable fashion. End of life and thorny issues in reproduction are well discussed. There is a useful chapter on



the ethics of audit and research, particularly the discussion of the justification for giving patients a placebo and data protection issues. Rationing and accountability are also raised and challenges posed. In some places the book goes beyond what I would regard as ethics, i.e. addressing how doctors present themselves and how complaints are dealt with. This is positive as these issues are relevant to students as they start to interact with patients on the wards.

The book is targeted at students in medicine and other health-care professions; all should read a book such as this at the beginning of their training. Those who are long qualified, and who probably never have, may well be challenged in some of their thinking and I would recommend it for practising health-care professionals as well. I suspect that many established practitioners browsing in a medical bookshop, having seen the title, may not open the cover – they should.

Mark Elliott, St James's University Hospital, Leeds

Pathology for Surgeons in Training: an A-Z Revision Text (3rd edn)

DL Gardner, DEF Tweedle
Arnold 2002
Pp 403. Price £35.00
ISBN 0340759046

This book is now in its third edition and is a vast improvement on previous versions. The layout is better and makes for easier reading. The authors have taken care to retain important core knowledge (e.g. thrombosis, inflammation, and neoplasia) as well as including recent developments. As intended, the book is really useful for quick reference and as a last-minute revision guide.

The authors adopt systematic methods in their explanations of pathology. These can be used as a framework for answering questions in the written and viva voce examination of the MRCS or AFRCS.

My only criticisms are that more liberal use of illustrations might have enhanced understanding, some of the diagrams are not easy to comprehend (e.g. the coagulation cascade) and the content on information technology is weak and perhaps already known by many surgical trainees.

The cross-referencing can be extensive and, at times, the essence of the topic being read becomes lost (e.g. immunity). It would probably be better to omit the topic links and keep the book as designed; an A-Z dictionary of general and surgical pathology.

I would recommend the book to surgical trainees but only as a guide for developing frameworks that can be used for written and oral examinations. As highlighted by the authors, this book should not be the sole material by which surgical pathology is learnt.

D Singh-Ranger, Royal Free and University College Hospitals Medical Schools, London

The Doctor's Communication Handbook (4th edn)

Peter Tate
Radcliffe Medical Press 2002
Price £21.95. Pp 208
ISBN 1 85775 998 2

Psychological care of patients is slowly but steadily being recognized as paramount, and skills involved are core for all clinicians. It starts with effective communication skills, and additions to the literature are welcome, especially when of this quality. The Doctor's Communication Handbook is now on

its fourth edition, nearly 10 years after the first but only two after the third. This reflects need and indicates NHS ambitions. Tate tells us about the consultation process, patients and ways we interact with them, and most importantly, he discusses the reasons behind such behaviours and attitudes.

I applaud the inclusion of a new chapter 'The magic move' dedicated to attitude and confidence as good hardly ever comes from unused skills. I agree with him in saying that the problem rarely lies in lack of knowledge, but in lack of confidence. The book is useful in helping to evaluate skills. Appendices provides practical proformas to guide us through the evaluation process. A chapter dedicated to special situations (breaking bad news, angry patients) addresses some challenging cases.

The reference section is good. Books and papers (although no website addresses) are grouped according to date of publication and quality, with some additional comments by the author. I found it slightly biased towards general practice, but it does not make it less relevant for doctors of other specialities. This is a highly readable book, clear and comprehensive.

Ignasi Agell, Leeds General Infirmary