health service failures. In most large organizations, line managers appraise employees. Doctors, however, are much more influenced by respected colleagues than by any manager. Thus peers need to play a leading role in the appraisal process within medical practice.

The authors are two management consultants, with extensive health service experience, and a GP. They outline seven key areas that the appraisal process should cover: good clinical care; maintaining good practice (keeping up to date); good relationships with patients; working with others; teaching and training; probity (integrity); and responsibility for colleagues. If these sound familiar, they are the areas identified by the General Medical Council for the forthcoming revalidation of all British doctors. The authors advocate basing the appraisal interview largely on questionnaires to staff (and patients), continuing education diaries, clinical audits and records of complaints or other significant events. The book covers tricky areas such as training for appraisers, confidentiality and feedback about unhelpful behaviour. I would have liked rather more about the whole process of dealing with suspected poor professional performance. It is clear that for appraisal to be done properly, training, protected time and other resources will be needed.

A practice partner and I drew on this book for appraising each other. Another colleague used it when performing appraisals of hospital consultants. We all found the book very helpful. The underlying concepts are clear, while the style and layout are easy to follow. Plenty of questionnaires and record sheets are included, while sources are suggested for others, such as for surveys of patients’ views. This brief book will help us move from interviews that concentrate on personal development, helpful as these are, to the comprehensive process that will be needed in the future.

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As term approached and another year was about to start, I was looking for a text on Ethics and this one arrived at just the right moment. This book, written by two GPs and purported to be for the ‘training general practitioner’, is composed of 11 chapters, four appendices and comes in at a reasonable size.

What I liked about it is that it is grounded in primary care, thus using multiple case histories in various ways and all the time bringing out crucial ethical questions, some with answers and some without—rather predictably. The major issues are covered: confidentiality, professional duties, fertility and consent. Here the imperative seems to be including each topic in an explanatory rather than exploratory way, and chapters end with a fairly good set of references and additional notes. My other favourite chapters are ‘The good death’ and ‘Resource allocation’—again two highly topical areas for clinical and general discussion. A strong point about the book is that it contains case-law; this is a useful component especially for us non-specialists.

Unfortunately, there are downsides to this book. The style of writing is rather simple in places, almost as if the authors thought the reader was trying not to understand ethics. Then I thought the authors under-emphasize cultural understanding of ethics and this limitation is not stated or made explicit until later chapters. An example here is that in Chapter 2 (professional duties), a small paragraph on patient's beliefs mentions “religious or ethnic culture differing markedly from that in Britain”. But we live in the UK in a multicultural society. In a book like this, such comment is insufficient, inappropriate and fairly laissez-faire.

I was also disappointed that other useful ethics titles were not in the bibliography—one I would certainly include would be The new dictionary of medical ethics (Boyd, Higgs and Pinching, BMJ publishing). All these factors, for me, take the book down a couple of quality notches—a shame since a sensible, purposeful book for GPs about ethics is not commonly encountered. In this case, expectation outweighs delivery.

SURINDER SINGH
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This is a neat little book created by collecting together a dozen articles that originally appeared in Health Information on the Internet. Robert Kiley is a medical librarian and has extensive experience of the interface between medicine and the Internet. These articles have been revised, updated and expanded with extra graphics, and make fascinating reading.

As Kiley says in a Preface, a search of the Internet often directs the user to pages where the information is inaccurate, biased, out of date and irrelevant. This book hopefully should take users straight to the most useful sites for the topic they are researching. It also provides a good jumping-off point for searching for information in the different areas covered. There are individual chapters on several areas of medicine, although there is no particular structure to the contents. There is perhaps
a little too much on women’s health (although it omits one of the best sites www.womenshealth.co.uk) and not enough on primary care. The articles are in the main written by the leaders in their fields.

The Web is an excellent place to find multimedia files, and this is pointed out repeatedly by the authors. Images and video as well as audio are well represented in the sites described. The fact that there is a website available with all of the links mentioned in the book means that you can avoid mistyping some of the very complex web addresses in the book. There is also a facility on this page to e-mail Robert with further suggestions for future editions.

This is an excellent book that anybody who is reasonably comfortable with the Internet should have on their bookshelf in case they need to answer a question about one of the subjects covered by its chapters. I hope that the next edition will be more wide ranging but still as succinct and readable. Despite being a GP with a special interest in the Internet, I still found new things in this book. I can thoroughly recommend it.

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