Book reviews

Depression and Dementia in Older People
Edited by P. W. Overstall
This CD-ROM has two components: content and technology.
The content is well researched and referenced, and guides the user through these two broad subjects in a clear, well-structured manner. The slide format is well thought out, easy to navigate and has useful links.
However, it is here that the structure begins to fall apart. The bright, well-designed, interactive slides are replaced by dull, textbook-style links. These sit poorly in this ‘innovative’ technology and beg the question why they were not placed in an accompanying booklet. They lack the positive aspects of the slides and fail to capitalise on the technology that separates them from the standard textbook.
The interactive cases, no doubt innovative in the late 1990s, when the CAL (computer-assisted learning) reviews were written, look and feel cumbersome, dated and slow, failing to deliver the ‘real life’ experience that they were attempting to replicate.
CAL will inevitably become an integral part of medical training and learning. One hopes that teachers and learners alike realise that this must always be an adjunct to, and not instead of, real life clinical experience. Paraphrasing Osler: To study the phenomena of disease without interactive CAL is to sail an uncharted sea. Whilst to study using only this technology without real patients is not to go to sea at all.

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Ethical Foundations of Palliative Care for Alzheimer’s Disease
Edited by R. B. Purtilo and H. A. M. J. Have
While palliative care for patients with cancer is well developed, the same cannot be said of the care of patients with end-stage dementia. In 2001, clinicians, philosophers and ethicists from USA and Europe, mostly from The Netherlands, met for a working conference. This book based on the conference reviews the health care of and challenges associated with Alzheimer’s disease (AD), the key philosophical, theological and ethical issues in general and in relation to palliative care decision-making, and ethical aspects of biomedical research. Throughout we are reminded that patients with AD are individuals who have feelings, fears and longings, and do not totally lack a self or personhood.
In addition to in-depth discussion of ethical issues, the book ends with an excellent declaration on ethical principles guiding palliative care of persons with AD that builds on the four general principles of autonomy, justice, beneficence

Aging with a Disability. What the Clinician Needs to Know
Edited by B. J. Kemp and L. Mosqueda
Young people with disabling conditions can develop rapid age-associated decline and suffer typical geriatric medical conditions such as falls, at an age when they may be in employment or rearing children. This is the topic of this American book, written largely for (American) therapists. Chapters range from personal testimonies, to elementary statistical theory, concepts such as coping and population ageing, and clinical topics such as polio and spinal cord injury.
I do not see that this book competes to be on the reading list of a physician or physician in training. However, I do appreciate the Editors’ choice to begin and end this book with chapters by consumers. The final chapter is written by a person who calls herself a PWD (a person with a disability) and advocates, amongst other things, tape recording consultations with professionals, emailing details of their conditions in advance of a consultation and requesting a consultation that is not during a rushed time. The case for such active consumers is well made, and offers a challenge to services for older cohorts more used to passivity.

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