Book reviews

Osteoporosis: At Your Fingertips
Edited by Stefan Cembrowicz and Theresa Allain

This book achieves its goal in providing a useful source of material to patients and the public on all aspects of osteoporosis. The language is easy to read and where scientific terms are used, they are properly explained. The first two chapters describe succinctly what osteoporosis is, how it is diagnosed, who gets it and what makes it worse. The question and answer format ensures that the subject matter does not become too technical and remains relevant to the needs of the public. The highlight of this book is the section on prevention and treatment through lifestyle, which focuses on important issues such as the correct type of exercise, diet and smoking cessation. The advice is accurate as well as being practically orientated. The drug treatment chapter is informative and the controversies regarding hormone replacement therapy are particularly well covered. This section, however, will need updating to take account of recently developed therapies such as strontium ranelate. I will have no hesitation in recommending this book to my patients.

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Medical Ethics in the Elderly
Edited by Gurcharan Rai

This second edition is a useful addition to the collection of anyone concerned about ethical issues in old age. It is also written at a level and with a style which would further understanding for junior doctors and medical students.

An introduction to the principles of medical ethics, while a little superficial, provides a useful grounding. There are then carefully chosen chapters written by eminent specialists. They cover a host of issues relevant to practising geriatricians, for example end-of-life care, driving in dementia and cardiopulmonary resuscitation. What is important is that the majority of the authors are or have been practising clinicians, so dilemmas discussed carry a palpable reality, contributing to the effectiveness of the text.

Each chapter is illuminated by examples to demonstrate aspects of the situations. Solutions are not always offered but how these problems can be approached is explored. Also contained within the text are updates on how the law stands on a variety of issues. While helpful in most instances, the law is rapidly changing.

The chapter on life-sustaining fluid and nutrition is particularly clear considering the complexities of the subject matter, and offers a support framework to aid decision making. Nevertheless, since the Burke case, these issues will become more complicated and carry the threat of doctors not being able to determine best interests, resulting inevitably in lawyers being involved in decision making more frequently.

The chapter on dementia and driving is also particularly helpful and sensitive. The last chapter on the Quality of Life in Healthcare decisions does not really consider quality of life from an ethical perspective. It presents an overview of quality of life measurement scales, which, while useful, do not address the underlying issues of what is actually important and can improve the quality of the life of an older patient.

A pleasing aspect of this book is that it can be easily ‘dipped into’ when wishing to gain guidance on a particular issue and does not need to be read from cover to cover. Some areas are a little repetitive (and not necessarily in agreement) but this does not present a major disadvantage and often offers a broader perspective.

This book is to be recommended due to its thoughtful, helpful layout and supportive guidance to help clinicians make the ‘right’ decisions in what are ever increasingly difficult clinical dilemmas.

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The Case Against Assisted Suicide: For the Right to End-of-life Care
Edited by Kathleen Foley and Herbert Hendin

This is a topical book, at the time of writing, with the Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill sitting with the Select Committee in the House of Lords. For readers who wish to unpick the components of the argument, it is also highly informative.

The editors have brought together important contributors who make their points in an eloquent and thoughtful way. The first section explores the moral and legal argument against assisted suicide, unpicking the issue from the perspective of duties, compassion and rights (from both
patients’ and doctors’ point of view) and also the legal framework. The second looks at assisted suicide from a practical stand-point, embracing a discussion about countries where it is or has been practised (Holland, America and Australia). The third looks at patients who may sit on the potential ‘slippery slope’. There is a focus on those who may find themselves vulnerable should such legislation be introduced. The final section provides the recommended solution looking at ideal end-of-life care and how it should be provided.

This is a detailed, intellectually challenging and insightful book, a must for those doctors and politicians with an opinion for or against a change in legislation.

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The Greying of India. Population Ageing in the Context of Asia
By Rajgopal Dhar Chakraborti

This book compiles data on the various demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of population ageing in Asia from different sources—UN reports and various government and non-government organisation surveys. It compares and contrasts these characteristics, introduces various technical measures used by population scientists, and analyses how and why fertility, mortality, migration, etc. interact and influence ageing across different Asian countries. It discusses general issues like the current status of the aged and the effects of ageing on societal development, and dwells on philosophical issues like graceful ageing. The appendices on policies, programmes, recommendations and diseases related to the aged are useful.

Perhaps in its attempt to highlight the Asian context, the discussions on the greying of India are markedly condensed in most chapters of the book, consequently failing to meet some of the expectations created by its title. The perspective of the aged about ageing is another important and increasingly researched area that is not covered. But for these limitations, the author should be commended for providing a single source of vital statistical data and a scientific overview on population ageing in Asia. The book makes useful reading for anyone interested in the science and the care of the aged.

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doi:10.1093/ageing/afi109