Book reviews

Palliative care for advanced Alzheimer’s and dementia: guidelines and standards for evidence-based care

Gary A. Martin and Marwan N. Sabbagh


This book is definitely on the side of the angels. It sets out to do what it says on the box: to provide guidelines and standards for evidence-based palliative care for people with advanced dementia. In doing so, it makes an interesting and valid point, which is that much research on dementia focuses on the mild to moderate stages. Indeed, the Dementia Strategy in England might ignore palliative care altogether if it were not for the hullabaloo that greeted the initial draft. But this book is motivated by the notion of person-centred, palliative care and has as one of its premises the thought that a person who is comfortable is receiving good-quality care, whereas discomfort of any sort indicates that more needs to be done. While presenting theory, it is also a practical book (aimed more perhaps at nursing staff) about feeding, dressing, bathing and so on. It reflects its American authorship, particularly in its references to law (and you can also learn about the customs of the Navajo Native Americans compared with Japanese Americans). Each chapter (whether to do with the milieu of care or the use of medication) ends with a box summarizing the standards that should be achieved. I am not sure about the quality of the evidence-base supporting every recommendation in this book, which is not helped by the lack of specific referencing; but I am sure that every care home and school of nursing should have a copy.

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Principles and practice of geriatric psychiatry, second edition

Marc E. Agronin and Gabe J. Maletta


This textbook is an intellectual tour de force. Comprehensive and detailed, it is the best textbook of geriatric psychiatry on the market. As a future fellow in geriatric psychiatry, I am glad to have read this work in residency. The editors were even able to include sections by founders in the field, namely Robert Butler and Gene Cohen. There is a special section just for the geriatric psychiatrist and corresponding approach to the geriatric patient. The book is interdisciplinary in nature and gives due credit to medical, as well as neurological, co-morbidities of the geriatric patient.

With regard to content, three chapters stand out among the rest. These refer to caregivers, geriatric bipolar disorder and neuroanatomy for the geriatric psychiatrist. Already thorough in their review, the authors further highlight the untold story of caregivers who kill. I have never read anything like it. The stories are very compelling, and they cite studies of incidence for caregiver homicide–suicide and respective risk factors. Their discussion really helps the geriatric psychiatrist to be mindful of the caregiver, and how without proper interventions, caregiver burnout could have lethal consequences.

Dr Forester’s chapter on geriatric bipolar disorder is one of the longest chapters in the textbook. Although every chapter is case based, his case was one of the most thorough and intellectually stimulating. He introduced gerodynamic behaviour therapy into his discussion and cited key studies on the uses of lithium in the geriatric population. Well written and thoughtful, his chapter will be a constant reference for me in the future.

I believe that no one should ever neglect to review the appendices of a textbook because often times, they serve as a good source of knowledge. The book’s first appendix is a very thorough review of neuroanatomy for the geriatric psychiatrist. Frankly, this review should be read by any practicing physician. The fact that the editors bothered to include such a comprehensive review of neuroanatomy lets the reader know that geriatric psychiatrists need to also be neuropsychiatrists. The multiple presentations of stroke are just one example of the importance of neuroscience.

This textbook has 49 chapters, and each chapter was written by leaders in the field. This book should be on the shelf of any doctor who works with older patients. The editors Agronin and Maletta have brought together an extraordinary textbook, one that will be an immediate classic. Readable and approachable, geriatricians will find value in this work.

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