

Following a brief introduction to medical ethics, this book comprises a series of 28 case studies which are grouped into four sections which cover the clinical encounter; non-clinical dimensions within the patient–physician relationship; medicines collective obligations and the effects of medicine as a business on the patient–physician relationship. All these studies appeared originally in the American College of Physicians (ACP) Observer between 1990 and 2003 and the commentaries, which accompany each study, expand on the college policy as set out in the ACP ethics manual.

Primarily written for physicians and medical students this book is easy to read with each of the case studies being followed by a lucid exposition of the ethical issues raised together with a reference list and an annotated bibliography of the more recent and relevant publications. It is a strength of this book that the approach to each case analysis is set in the ‘real world’ and not in a ‘dry analysis of principles’. In that regard it will appeal.

The problems for the occupational physician in the United Kingdom are that firstly there are no case histories which are directly relevant to the practice of occupational medicine and secondly that the situation in which the cases are set, as well as the subsequent discussion, is primarily American. The health care system and regulatory framework in the United States being markedly different from those in the United Kingdom does detract from the exposition of the exampled ethical dilemmas. Nevertheless, the case studies do reflect the practical ethical dilemmas encountered in clinical practice and as such have a universal relevance.

Overall as a guide for the physician in helping reach an ethical decision, this book is worth dipping into as long as one can get beneath the American context.

Rating

☆☆☆ (Borrow from the library)

Roger Rawbone