

Book reviews

Inherited Susceptibility to Cancer: Clinical, Predictive and Ethical Perspectives

Edited by William D Foulkes and Shirley V Hodgson, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, 456 pages, £60.00.

There has been much debate over recent years about the impact that research in the field of genetics and progress in the human genome project will make on clinical practice. In many areas the discussion is still very much theoretical, since although there have been interesting research developments these have generally not been transferable to the clinical setting. However, in the field of cancer genetics, in particular in familial cancers, there have been considerable changes to clinical practice as research findings over the past decade have been implemented. The inheritance of germline mutations in cancer-predisposing genes explains only a small proportion of all cancers but is a considerable cause of mortality and morbidity. For some of these genes, testing is now possible so that people from "cancer families" can be advised whether or not they have inherited a high risk of cancer. This sort of information obviously carries clinical implications as well as ethical and moral implications and it is this overall package that the book aims to address.

The editors have gathered together an impressive list of 30 different contributors and have organised the book into two sections: part one covers the ethical, legal and social issues and the counselling aspects involved in this area, as well as the technical aspects of mutation detection. The second part goes through the hereditary contribution to cancer in an anatomical site-

specific way. This section is rounded off by a chapter on "late-breaking developments", a necessary chapter since this is such a rapidly evolving field; indeed some of the information in the chapters is already out of date and in general references are pre-1996.

The authors state that the book is not intended as a textbook for a cancer genetics course but do not specifically outline who they expect their main readership to be; presumably those professionals already working in the field who want more background information. This the book does provide, although there is some inevitable overlap with so many contributors and there is sometimes a different emphasis, depending on where the contributor comes from.

For example, the chapter on ethical and legal perspectives focuses on the situation in the USA, whilst the chapter on cancer genetics in primary care clearly focuses on the situation in the UK. Since there are significant differences between both health care provision and legal issues in the USA and the UK the reader is left with some gaps in knowledge.

The second section provides a useful summary of the latest research findings for different familial cancers. Thus from a clinical geneticist's point of view this will be a useful book to turn to if confronted with a family history of say, a particular endocrine tumour. Although the book is perhaps less useful if one wanted to obtain a grounding in ethical principles it does provide a good summary of these aspects as well as of the clinical, legal, social and practical issues of cancer genetics that a practising cancer geneticist may need. Rather than needing to turn to several different texts, the cancer geneticist will find most of the issues relevant to clinical practice summarised here in one book.

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Medico-legal Aspects of Reproduction and Parenthood

J K Mason, Aldershot, Dartmouth, 1998, 398 pages, £60 (hb), £25(pb).

John Kenyon Mason is a forensic pathologist who has also attained the distinction of a doctorate of law. Thus, the reader will not be surprised that the subject matter covered is a diverse range of legal, medical and ethical issues surrounding reproduction and the parental relationship with the resultant child. The text is extensively referenced. However, the ethical component could be described as somewhat of a gloss - the book is heavily weighted with medical and legal fact. This is not a criticism, as the title does not promise to deliver a substantial text on moral philosophy.

The object of this revised edition has been to update the first edition. However, the medical law and ethical thinking of seven years ago has not been ignored by Mason, but rather used to highlight the significance of recent changes in medical law and ethics and to support his proposals for the future. This approach is to be commended as we must understand from whence we have come in order to proceed forward in an effective manner. The first two chapters are of historical and legal interest as are the last two chapters. These will be of interest to lawyers and social welfare professionals, respectively. However, the purpose of this review will be to focus upon the medical ethics content of this work.

This book, as a text on medical ethics, will be of value to the person interested in the medical ethics of human reproduction but as it covers most aspects of the subject it fails to provide deep analysis. Mason reviews the familiar dilemmas created by the availability of contraception and steri-

lisation, abortion and the moral status of the fetus and fetal experimentation. The author also discusses the more recent dilemmas of the new reproductive technologies, for instance the management of infertility and surrogacy. To assess Mason's ability to communicate the complexities of medical ethics one has only to turn to chapters five and ten on abortion and surrogacy. Abortion is often assumed to be a dead issue by the uninformed, but is and will remain very much a live and sensitive subject. Most writers who attempt to come to grips with abortion, the moral value of the embryo and fetus and surrogacy often reveal paradox or inconsistency in their thinking.

Mason makes the point that abortion is more than contraception. The former, he argues, seeks to prevent a life which is developing and the latter merely to prevent a life from beginning; he concludes that as the state has an interest in protecting human life, there exists a valid reason for statutory regulation of abortion. Mason argues that the critical point is to decide what form of human life is at stake and what level of protection it should be afforded. He then reports upon the opposing pro-life and pro-choice arguments on which the abortion debate is founded and identifies as significant the questions: when does human life begin and what is human life. Mason presents a balanced discussion and identifies his preferred stance as the gradualist approach at his conclusion. In this approach he persists throughout chapters six and seven, which are concerned with protection of the fetus and fetal experimentation.

Mason's attempt to grapple with the ethics of surrogacy is disappointing. Under the heading "moral aspects" he writes "Given that [the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990] provides satisfactory regulation of surrogacy, there seems little to choose between [adoption and contract pregnancies] from the child's point of view, insofar as the child [in the case of partial surrogacy] is returning to its biological father, the surrogacy arrangement is preferable...". In fact, the 1990 act is quite prohibitive of surrogacy arrangements: parenting orders only apply to commissioning couples who are married and when the surrogacy arrangement has worked out. This raises a whole host of questions about the moral values of the Legislature. Also, Mason's emphasis upon consanguinity is a very narrow viewpoint. Surely the intention of prospec-

tive parents, whether adopting or commissioning, is more relevant. That is not to say that a focus upon intention alone is not problematic.

On the whole I found this text engaging and accessible. However, it cannot be described as an ethics text but is of value to moral philosophers who would like to consolidate their understanding with a knowledge of the realities of life, apparent in the frustrations of clinical practice and the legal process, and the law's preference for pragmatism. I was often frustrated that Mason preferred endnotes rather than footnotes. This is of more relevance not only to the lawyer, because the year in which the relevant cases were heard or reported is helpful information and is best placed as a footnote, but also to any reader who wishes to benefit from a chronological understanding of change.

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Treating Eating Disorders: Ethical, Legal and Personal Issues

Edited by Walter Vandereycken and Pierre J V Beaumont, London, The Athlone Press, 1998, 286 pages, £45 (hb) £16.95 (pb).

This is a thought-provoking book which considers the ethical, legal and personal issues involved in the treatment of eating disorders. The book tackles these issues from three different angles: firstly, the clinician's responsibility to act ethically and competently, secondly, the patient's competency with respect to compulsory treatment, and finally, the role of society in providing the right context for ethical management of eating disorders. The contributors are specialists in eating disorders with considerable experience in these areas. Excellent references are provided at the end of each chapter.

Chapter one highlights the paradoxes in treating eating disorders and the range of feelings experienced by the therapist. The dual and often conflicting responsibilities to treat the patient's illness effectively and to respect the patient's autonomy, wishes and values are well portrayed. In chapter two the authors suggest that therapists have an ethical responsibil-

ity to understand both patients' and their own personal feelings. Two chapters deal with the issue of gender and its influence on therapy. This issue is brought to life by a personal account of the experience of being a male therapist treating women with eating disorders. The ethical issue of how to engage patients while maintaining good professional boundaries is discussed, highlighting the importance of supervision. The writer emphasises the need for therapists to understand the influence of their own family of origin as well as their attitudes to male and female roles and relationships.

Three chapters deal with the contentious issue of compulsory treatment. Chapter six provides a balanced account of the dilemmas in choosing a path between a paternalistic or utilitarian approach and a more libertarian approach. The ethical principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, justice and utility are well argued in this respect and the view is put forward that in certain cases compulsory treatment is not a threat but a right. There is a consideration of how compulsory treatment should be implemented, pointing out the inconsistency in legislation between and within countries. The need for more standard ethical guidelines and procedures is noted. The following chapter discusses more generally the legality of forced feeding in a range of situations, including hunger-strikes in prison. The issue of competence to consent is touched on but I would like to have seen more discussion regarding the difficulties in assessing competence in people with eating disorders. There is some mention of consent to treatment in minors, highlighting the anomalies in the law. However, considering that many patients with eating disorders are under the age of 18, the dilemmas raised by the treatment of minors are perhaps not explored enough.

In chapter eight the writer argues against compulsory treatment for anorexia nervosa. He emphasises the importance of understanding the needs and wishes of patients, stating that treatment contrary to patients' wishes may not satisfy the principle of beneficence and is almost always unethical. Limited knowledge of the outcome of compulsory treatment is cited as another reason for being very cautious about this approach. The writer also emphasises the possible change in consent over time and the need to disentangle coercion from compulsion. Alternatives to compulsory treatment such as engaging psycho-