

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Helen MacDonald. *Human remains: dissection and its histories.* Yale University Press; 2006 (Melbourne University Press; 2005). Pp 224, US\$ 35, ISBN 0-300-11699-3. Reviewed by A Andermann in *CMAJ* 2007; 176 (12).

The book describes the history of dissection and the ethics of using human remains. The author describes how early practitioners felt they owned these remains and, therefore, they could use them any way they wanted, and how these attitudes have continued to the present day, leading to abuses.

Atul Gawande. *Better: a surgeon's notes on performance.* Profile Books; 2007. Pp ISBN 1-861-97897-9, £12.99. **Pauline W Chen** *Final exam: a young surgeon's reflections on mortality.* Alfred A Knopf; 2007. Pp 288, ISBN 0-307-26353-3, US\$ 23.95. Reviewed by E Williams in *Lancet* 2007; 369:2069-70.

Gawande, a surgeon with a degree in public health and politics, describes how paying attention to detail has helped him and the medical profession. Being mindful of simple things like washing hands can make a huge difference to the outcome. Chen, also a surgeon, describes her encounters with donors and recipients of transplant organs. Both try to make sense of the vast and growing science of medicine.

Stephen P Hinshaw. *The mark of shame: stigma of mental illness and an agenda for change.* New York: Oxford University Press; 2007. Pp 332, US\$ 35, ISBN 978-0-19-530844-0. Reviewed by CM Kelly in *N Engl J Med* 2007; 357:311-2.

The book starting with the theories of mental illness goes on to describe the historical treatment of the mentally ill, the institutionalisation that they endured and the social stigma that they suffer to this day.

Dan Hurley. *Natural causes: death, lies, and politics in America's vitamin and herbal supplement industry.* New York: Broadway Books; 2006. Pp. 336, US\$ 23.95, ISBN 978-0-7679-2042-1. Reviewed by D Marcus in *N Engl J Med* 2007; 356:2659.

People assume that alternative therapies like health supplements and natural foods are gentle and safe, but this book describes detailed case histories of those who have suffered serious consequences from using these products. The author describes the political manipulations that have allowed manufacturers to escape retribution while continuing to promote this lucrative industry. He proposes steps to increase safety of these products.

Sharon E Sytsma (ed). *Ethics and intersex: International library of ethics, law, and the new medicine (Vol. 29.)* Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer; 2006. Pp 336, US\$ 149, ISBN 978-1-4020-4313-0. Reviewed by I Hughes in *N Engl J Med* 2007; 356:2434-5.

This book discusses the difficult topic of undifferentiated sex organs at birth and the dilemmas in dealing with the parents and children. Societal and medical attitudes and practices have evolved over the ages, and various authors deal with the complexities of the situation.

Paul Collier. *The bottom billion: why the poorest countries are failing and what can be done about it.* Oxford University Press; 2007. Pp 224, US\$ 28, £16.99, ISBN 0-19531-145-0. Reviewed by W Easterly in *Lancet* 2007; 370:1475-6.

The author, an Oxford University economist, describes why foreign aid is often unable to improve poverty, and what the solutions to this tragic problem are. The reviewer feels that Collier bases his recommendations on statistical associations between foreign aid, military action and national outcomes, but he cannot determine that one is the cause of the other and, therefore, his recommendations are unrealistic to say the least.

James V Lavery, Christine Grady, Elizabeth R Wahl, Ezekiel J Emanuel, eds. *Ethical issues in international biomedical research: A casebook.* Oxford University Press; 2007. Pp 400, £32.99, ISBN 0-19-517922-4. Reviewed by A Costello in *Lancet* 2007; 370:1025-6.

The reviewer recommends this book highly for the excellent case studies and reviews of issues such as informed consent, community effectiveness studies, and obligations of researchers to provide support to study participants.

Raj S Bhopal. *Ethnicity, race, and health in multicultural societies: foundations for better epidemiology, public health, and health care.* Oxford University Press; 2007. Pp 376, £32.50, ISBN 0-19-856817-7. Reviewed by P Allotey in *Lancet* 2007; 370:475-6.

Race and ethnicity often determine the healthcare that minority populations receive, and it is the responsibility of medical professionals to address this discrimination. The author, while highly aware of this, describes the difficulty in separating the causes of a particular illness as related to genetic predisposition, cultural behaviours of the particular population, or behaviour of others towards the group being studied. The approach to treatment depends on which particular cause is felt to be paramount.