

Relevant across cultures

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Catherine Tay, Leslie Tay. *Medico-legal and ethical issues in cardiology and general medicine*. Singapore: McGraw-Hill Education (Asia); 2010 pp 200 US\$12.50 ISBN-13: 978-0-07-131290-5.

With the increasing complexity in medical care and in the doctor-patient relationship, it is important to keep in mind ethical issues in medical practice and their medico-legal implications. In this book, Prof Tay and Dr Leslie Tay deal with a variety of medical scenarios that are easily identifiable for medical professionals. Succinct and relevant take home messages are given at the end of each scenario. Many of the scenarios are very common, others are somewhat rare. Yet each one carries the reader forward towards a better appreciation of the subject. Problems can arise because of poor communication, lack of knowledge of cultural and other aspects, inability to convince patients about a modality of therapy, etc. The book deals with several cases where these aspects play a role. The case on the inability to afford medical care (Scenario 17) describes what most Indian doctors have to deal with in our hospitals, particularly when serving people

from poor socio-economic backgrounds. Likewise, the case on human organ transplantation (Scenario 44) brings home what every transplant team has to deal with in an ethical manner. Another issue relates to withdrawal of life support systems in the ICU setting (Scenario 20) which we face frequently in our hospitals. Financial, ethical, emotional and religious considerations often play a role in the decision making, which is never easy. The appendix is a useful addition and highlights many points which a clinician may not have grasped with clarity. The elaboration of the cardiac cases will be of particular interest to practising cardiologists, but some scenarios are of general clinical interest too. While cultural and other issues may somewhat colour the cases one has to deal with, there can be no doubt that the essential matrix is lucid. This book should find a place in every medical college library as well as major medical institutions, with an emphasis on multispecialty medical centres. Practising lawyers with a special interest in medico-legal issues would also be benefitted. The book is based broadly on Singapore laws, but one sees that there are certain fundamental principles governing medical care which are common across cultures.

The ophthalmologist and the law

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Catherine Tay, Kah Guan Au Eong. *Medico-legal and ethical issues in eye care: case scenarios for optometrists, opticians, ophthalmologists and family physicians*. Singapore: McGraw-Hill Education (Asia); 2009. Pp 248. ISBN:978-007-126994-0. US \$43.

The complexity and tension in the relationships between the patient, the ophthalmologist, the optometrist, the optician and the family physician, against the backdrop of ever-progressing ophthalmic technology within the confines of the law, are palpable. This book authored by a lecturer in law, Catherine Tay, and a practising ophthalmologist, Kah Guan Au Eong, is likely to guide eye care professionals in dealing with patients efficiently within the stern boundaries of legislation.

The number of malpractice suits against eye care professionals is on the rise in the wake of increasing awareness among the public. To understand the implications of a 'wrongful act', it is necessary to be fully informed about the working of the legal

system, acts that are likely to be considered unlawful, specific unlawful acts in medical practice and methods to safeguard against these. There is a need to understand the legal aspects of entering into a contract in business and the sale of goods by opticians.

However, it is not always 'law' that guides us in our acts, but also moral principles and ethical codes. Ethical principles, when duly followed, enable a medical practitioner to overcome the paternalistic approach to a patient and safeguard him/her against a 'wrongful act'. The legal and ethical dimensions to be understood, followed, and integrated into medical practice have been clearly portrayed in the first part of the book by the authors.

The best way to learn about the right applications of legal and ethical issues in day to day medical practice, while dealing with patients, is through case scenarios. In the second part of the book, the authors describe probable ethical dilemmas

and legalities through common situations in ophthalmic practice. Issues pertaining to competence of the patient and the importance of valid consent are elaborated in the first few case scenarios. The duties and responsibilities of optometrist, optician and ophthalmologist, negligence and delayed or missed diagnosis, are depicted in the form of cases

Research in ophthalmology is at the frontline. Several regulations need to be followed by the researcher when conducting a study, including a clinical trial, in order to ensure respect for the autonomy of the participants. The roles of the researcher-doctor, as a researcher and as a doctor, need to be understood. The needs and the role of a research participant-patient are equally important to appreciate. These concerns have been highlighted clearly through case scenarios in this book.

Informal consultations and over-the-counter prescriptions are issues often encountered by professionals without their realising the possible consequences. These issues are covered by the authors through examples in the form of case vignettes.

No surgeon can boast of never having had a surgical complication. When complications occur, issues erupt pertaining to the disclosure of complications to patients,

referral to other doctors, managing another surgeon's complications, and second opinions. These issues are presented here in apt case scenarios.

The professional etiquette to be pursued by optometrists, opticians and ophthalmologists while dealing with each other is extremely important in today's world of competition. Problematic situations may arise due to referrals, differing opinions, overlapping responsibilities and defamation, and have been depicted with suitable case scenarios.

Ethical issues like honouring the privacy of the patient, maintaining confidentiality, disclosure of information and shared confidentiality have been discussed with 'when, how, whom and why' questions in a range of case situations. Finally the role of an eye care professional as a legal witness has been presented with examples.

The book therefore presents itself as a practice guide for eye care professionals in dealing with eye care practice, while safeguarding the interests of eye patients, and of themselves. It may also be referred to by students to understand the basics of ethical and legal issues in ophthalmology.

Spotlight on grey areas

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Catherine Tay, Shirley Ooi. *Medico legal issues in emergency medicine and family practice*. Singapore: McGraw Hill Education; 2008. Pp 168. ISBN: 0071265538A\$ 25.

This book should be a part of induction for all doctors getting into emergency medicine, or any practice, so that they have a good start before diving into an "uncertain grey area". The best things in life are simple. The brilliance of this book lies in its simplicity and the common scenarios which are easy to identify with.

The emergency room is a place of high uncertainty. The patients and scenarios can be as varied as they can get. This book can give the emergency physician clarity of thought in times of uncertainty, when/he has to react within minutes and at odd hours. Though there are many variations in laws and cultures across the globe, a written guide about what is best to do in a given scenario is definitely handy.

The topics covered are not traditionally taught in medical schools (at least in India). The most vulnerable doctor facing such scenarios would be the least experienced. Hence it

becomes imperative for newly graduated doctors to be equipped with the knowhow. In this era of litigation, it is important for doctors to be good at documentation and communication (again not taught well in medical schools) which this book touches on those aspects which free every doctor to practise without the stress of being sued.

I especially liked the part of the book that talks about impending lawsuits. We need not think like lawyers, but we still need to be prepared for all possible questions about the case and have all the necessary supporting documentation. The book emphasises that the more the documentation, the less the chances of a lawsuit. Generally, basic life support training is given to all staff joining a major hospital. Yet most doctors are anxious about being legally liable for damage done when rendering emergency care to a patient. In another case scenario, the book makes the simple but often overlooked point that one should just follow the protocol.

The authors must be congratulated on their efforts to produce this simple and essential reference book which has turned the spotlight on troublesome areas in emergency medicine.