

# Book Reviews

**Resolving Ethical Dilemmas: A Guide for Clinicians.** By Bernard Lo. 373 pp. Baltimore, Williams & Wilkins, 1995. \$35 (paper). ISBN 0-683-05138-5.

Dr. Lo, a general internist at the University of California-San Francisco, has contributed numerous thoughtful articles to the medical ethical literature. Now he has produced a succinct, fairly comprehensive overview of the ethical problems likely to be encountered by clinicians. Reflecting his specialty training, Lo addresses few of the ethical issues expected to arise in pediatric or obstetric practice, but he does nicely balance inpatient and ambulatory issues.

As the title suggests, the book focuses on ethical "dilemmas"; therefore, there is occasional mention of the importance of moral integrity and little if any mention of virtue or moral character. Brief attention is given to newer developments in ethical theory, such as casuistry and feminist thought. Lo does try to address ethical issues that arise from cultural diversity.

The book has many strengths. Having many short chapters allows Lo to address some clinically relevant issues that seldom merit full attention in ethics textbooks, such as gifts from patients to physicians, sexual contact with patients, gifts from drug companies, and mistakes of disclosure. The discussions are up-to-date, and such important issues as advance directives and do not resuscitate orders are discussed fairly extensively, with many practical observations about effective communication with patients and families. The illustrative cases (usually one or two in each chapter) are short but are used effectively in the discussion. Issues that particularly affect medical students and residents are given reasonable attention. Lo's recommendations are generally well founded, even where the length of the chapters forbids more than a telegraphic list of the arguments for and against the opposing views.

This text will provide useful guidance to clinicians seeking advice on ethical problems in practice. Teachers of clinical students and residents will want to supplement the book with journal articles or chapters from other books to give the learner a better feel for deeper moral dialogue and argument; the references and suggested readings at the end of each chapter will provide a useful guide to additional resources.

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**Accessing Medical Information from a Desert Island with Telephone Service: How to Get and Organize the Information You Need to Practice Most Effectively.** By Marc Ringel. Greeley, CO, Desert Island Press, 1993. \$14.95 (paper).

The author makes very clear from the beginning of this book that remote does not necessarily mean Windy City, Wyoming. It could be your home or office in St. Louis or your call room in San Diego. A desert

island, *from a medical standpoint*, is anywhere you do not have the information you need at the time you need it.

This book can be read in approximately 2 hours. It is equal parts technical information and philosophy—the Zen of adult learning as applied to the medical profession. The author takes a critical look at the medical information needs that physicians have and suggests pragmatic ways to meet those needs. He discusses books, journals and personal files, electronic and computer resources, and consultants.

Traditional medical education, for the most part, stresses that we should learn everything we can through memorization. We are to acquire medical knowledge, not system knowledge. Dr. Ringel appropriately, I believe, acknowledges that we all have memory limitations and that we instead need to rethink our methods of knowledge acquisition and organization. By keeping a very few selected books; choosing and reading journals wisely; and knowing how, affordably, to select and use a personal computer with medical data base search capability, we can answer practice questions and meet many of our ongoing learning goals.

Two audiences would be particularly well-served by this book. Students and residents are, of course, the first. Ideally, they could be reached before they acquire bad learning habits, such as thinking they should carry every reference book they can, or that they should measure the value of a learning source by its weight in pounds.

The other audience includes the more mature learner who has not yet used his or her home or office computer for searching the various medical data bases, such as MEDLINE. The author's plain-language approach to the subject makes it easy to understand. This book is not for the medical informatics expert—it would be considered too basic.

I liked this book for what it is: a refreshingly honest look at the specific needs of adult learners who happen to be medical practitioners. It cuts through the educational rituals we have accepted as the norm and suggests better ways, such as using easy but powerful medical data bases accessed through a computer. It reminds us that, in the long run, if we can differentiate a sick patient from a well one and structure an investigation using organized information sources, our patients' needs and our own will be well served. This book provides a user-friendly way to get onto the entrance ramp of the information superhighway.

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**Clinical Medicine: A Textbook for Medical Students and Doctors. Second Edition.** Edited by Parveen Kumar and Michael Clark. 1135 pp., illustrated. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders, 1994. \$45.00 (paper). ISBN 0-7020-1739-6.

*Clinical Medicine* is a softcover, 1135-page text, 18×26 cm and 5 cm thick. When I first saw this text, my ini-