

# Book Reviews

## Bioethics, Human Rights and Health Law. Principles and Practice

By Ames Dhai and David McQuoid-Mason. Pp. xiv + 194. R245.99. Juta & Company. 2011. ISBN 978-0-70218-052-1.

Given its title this slim volume, running to just 200 pages, is deceptive. With elegance, accessibility and easy readability it deals with complex (and it must be said potentially dry) matters of great importance to health practitioners in the South African health delivery environment. The authors and contributing authors are authorities, and the text is thoroughly referenced – not just with the South African Constitution, the National Health Act and the myriad other health Acts, the key founding documents of modern medical ethics deriving from the Nuremburg Code and the World Medical Association Declarations and the excellent series of guidelines provided by the Health Professions Council of SA (all web addresses supplied), but also with pertinent articles from the medical and legal literature.

The book is aimed at the self-directed learner (of which more later) in all the health professions and is arranged into two main sections, the first being 'Introduction to Bioethics, Human Rights and Health Law', which provides the background to the second section, 'Specific Topics'. The latter deals with issues of professionalism within the practitioner-patient relationship and opens with a superb chapter titled 'The cornerstone of healthcare practice'. The rest of this section is right up to date, dealing with HIV and AIDS, resource allocation, human health and the environment, research ethics and other topics, importantly all from the South African perspective.

In relation to the self-directed learner, each chapter begins with a list of the reader's expected knowledge outcomes after absorption of the facts contained in the chapter, and ends with a series of questions relating to that reading. Here I have a suggestion – the content is complex, and I should have liked an appendix at the end of the book offering brief answers to the questions posed, against which to test the reader's own answers. (Perhaps the authors might consider this suggestion for a future edition?)

In their preface the authors state that the book is intended as an introductory guide for health care and law students and also for medical and legal practitioners; their ambition is fully realised. However, given the complexity of the information provided – albeit, as said, in an easy-to-read style – my recommendation would be that *all* practitioners have this excellent book in their personal libraries for easy reference when faced, as we all are from time to time, with an ethical dilemma.

**Janet Seggie, MD, FRCP (Lond), FCP (SA)**

*Specialist Physician*

## Medical Ethics, Law and Human Rights: A South African Perspective

Edited by Keymanthri Moodley. Pp. xx + 377. R369.95. Van Schaik Publishers. 2011. ISBN 978-0-672-02809-0.

Issues related to ethics, law and human rights enter into the everyday work of medicine and the health sciences. Almost daily we encounter scenarios that raise ethical concerns – from laboratory work on stored human tissue, or interactions between health care providers and patients, to the shape of policies and programmes to deliver services to populations. Yet most health care providers and managers have had little formal training in ethics, law and human rights. As a result, most deal with ethical concerns with little preparation, or, worse, fail altogether to recognise the potential implications of their work.

This edited volume fills a critical role by introducing a comprehensive and practical approach to the kinds of ethical, legal and human rights issues that doctors and other health care providers may encounter on a daily basis. The authors are drawn from South Africa's leading experts in this field. Significantly, most are clinicians who have gone on to study and work in bioethics, ensuring that the content is both theoretically sound and eminently practical.

The book is divided into two sections. The first introduces key concepts in ethics, law and human rights (including surprisingly easy-to-read chapters on the philosophical basis for modern bioethics). Chapters in the second section discuss the ethical concerns that arise in different areas of clinical practice, such as paediatrics, mental health, end-of-life care, genetics, HIV/AIDS and organ transplantation. Of particular value is a chapter presenting a framework for decision making when faced with ethical dilemmas. Although there are comprehensive chapters on research ethics and global health, this work focuses squarely on issues of health care provision in the South African context.

The volume appears to be targeted at introductory and mid-level audiences. The material is presented in a well-organised and easy-to-follow format; potentially difficult content is presented in an approachable (and at times entertaining) style. Concepts and issues are carefully explained, with examples and case studies, most of which are drawn from South Africa, used to demonstrate how theories can play out in the real world. In most chapters these case studies are followed by several questions to the reader, and then a commentary explores different approaches to answering the discussion questions.

Overall, the presentation is clear enough to be digested by undergraduate students, but the content and format will appeal greatly to clinicians and managers working in services. More generally, this volume provides an invaluable starting place for any health professional who has faced a potential ethical challenge and not known quite what to do.

**Landon Myer, MA, MPhil, MB ChB, PhD**

*School of Public Health and Family Medicine  
University of Cape Town*

## Global Health and Global Health Ethics

*Edited by Solomon Benatar and Gillian Brock. Pp viii + 342. R480. Cambridge University Press. 2011. ISBN 978-0-521-14677-7.*

This book is extensively researched and provides enlightening insights into the challenges of improving and promoting global health in the 21st century. It allows the reader to understand among other things what has driven and shaped the world over the past century and why many current consumption patterns are largely unsustainable. It emphasises how an exaggerated focus on a privileged few has resulted in harsh consequences and neglect for the greater proportion of the world's people, perpetuating the widening disparities in wealth and health, with health care services being driven by adverse market forces and not being designed to meet the demands of local burdens of disease equitably. Other factors, including population growth, the emergence of new infections, ecological degradation and wars, are examined from the perspective of their impact on individual and population health.

This book extends the trajectory of focus from the micro level of individual health and ethics of interpersonal relationships to include more general justice concerns at the macro level of population health. It intimately links global health challenges to issues of social justice and the global political economy. This is done quite artfully by all the authors, who are international experts in their fields and from a range of disciplines including medicine, philosophy and the social sciences. They bring to light how poor global health is exacerbated and offer remedies for the factors identified.

They also offer reasons why inaction is unacceptable, hence linking up global health with the field of justice. Constructive suggestions and practical and theoretical guidance are provided on how global and national policy and institutional changes could significantly improve the current situation. If these recommendations were to be followed, it is likely that major progress and advancement in global health would result. Topics covered range from the human right to health, infectious diseases, global health economics, climate change and the environment to biotechnology and food security.

The book is divided into four sections. Section 1 deals with the definitions and descriptions of global health. Section 2 appraises some central issues pertaining to global health ethics, responsibilities and justice. Section 3 analyses some reasons for poor health, and section 4, entitled 'Shaping the Future', offers recommendations to make the changes needed for a meaningful improvement in global health. The chapters offer an abundance of empirical data and are concise and succinct, and the content is well organised and presented in an easy-to-follow format with the text being thoroughly referenced.

The book should be read by all who are interested in global health, the global political economy and social justice, and is a valuable resource for ethicists, public health practitioners and local and international policy makers.

**Ames Dhai, MB ChB, FCOG (SA), LL.M**

*Steve Biko Centre for Bioethics, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg*