

Patient's Interest First

The Nature of Medical Ethics & The Dilemma of a Good Doctor

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This 110 pages soft-cover book is authored mainly by Arthur SM Lim, a well-known ophthalmologist. It is divided into 8 chapters. Contributing authors include Gwee Ah Leng (Chapters I & II), V Balakrishnan (Chapter VII) and Khoo Chong Yew (Chapter VIII). There is an epilogue and 2 appendices.

Chapters I & II deal with the concept and controversies of ethics. Medical Ethics arose as a social and moral concept of good behaviour among doctors. Over the years it has obtained legal sanction encoded in the Medical Registration Act. In recent times, many controversies have arisen primarily as a result of advances in technology and the rising cost of medical care. Health rationing is a reality. Challenges to professional confidentiality in the courts or to the patient's interest when this conflicts with that of the community has generated much debate. The demands of evidence-based medicine may not coincide with patients' desires. What constitutes advertisement? And where do we draw the line between advertising and the public right to information? The problem of self-interest and the teaching of medical ethics – or punishment involving doctors, merit attention. Finally, for the terminally ill, even the issue of the right to die is being hotly contended. Many questions will continue to be asked and controversies will be carried into the next millennium.

Chapters III to VI expanded on some of these issues. A fine attempt was made to define "The

Good Doctor and Excellence in Medicine". National medical manpower, the patient's right to information, internal and external constraints to medical practice, and the economics of health care were dealt with.

Chapter VII is concerned with the quality of life and the right to live. These are matters which transcend medical to moral and legal dimensions. Euthanasia is now openly discussed in medical circles and in public the world over. Recent legalisation on Advance Medical Directive and the Definition of Death will certainly have an impact on decisions patients and physicians make.

The last segment (Chapter VIII) addresses the problems in promoting ethics to doctors and their patients as well as at the National, University, and Hospital levels.

Overall, this book serves as a timely reminder of the ethical issues that challenge the medical profession as a whole and the individual doctor in his or her day to day practice.

Every doctor will clearly benefit from reading this compact volume. We agree that the patient's interest must come first and foremost. More important than reading and writing about ethics, there is a cogent need for doctors who can role model and practise by these precepts.

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