Book review: End-of-life care: ethics and law
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What is This?
Book review


Reviewed by: Verena Tschudin, University of Surrey, UK

This is an unusual book in every way: it is A4 size, has 470 pages in a large-size font; it is a teaching book and is useful for the public; it is full of information, yet not overloaded; it is very thoughtfully and empathically put together, and the material is at the same time available online.

The book consists of eight modules on aspects of end-of-life care put within an ethical framework for decision making. While the main readership is intended to be health-care professionals and law lecturers and students, it is also just as relevant for people at their end of life, their families, and carers. It presents the material in a systematic way, with each module following the same pattern, clearly laid out, with many examples and references. It contains small paragraphs, yet giving weighty information in a very clear way that with each new page, one has what one needs under a topic but is drawn to learn more. The modules are concerned with specific issues in end-of-life care, such as breaking bad news, the role of rights, managing pain, life-prolonging treatments, and so on.

It is evident that a huge amount of planning and coordinating went into the writing of this book to present the material in a very accessible way. The modules are intended for teaching, but they do not tell readers what to do; they offer tools for thinking about difficult ethical and legal issues in the care of people who are dying. The book is set within the practice and legal boundaries of Ireland, but its impact is surely way beyond the confines of this one country. The examples and cases used are drawn from practice and have relevance in almost any setting.

The obvious drawbacks could be the shaded text of examples, where the shading is perhaps too dark to read the text easily, and some text is in a fine font, making it even more difficult, especially in artificial light. These are small issues against what is surely one of the best books on the market in the field of ethics and law in end-of-life care. I recommend it wholeheartedly to anyone concerned with the topic. For its size and content it is also quite a bargain.