

## BOOK REVIEW

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### *A Review of Human Values in Pediatric Hematology/Oncology*

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**REFERENCE:** Truman, J. T., van Eys, J., and Pochedly, C., Eds., *Human Values in Pediatric Hematology/Oncology*, Praeger Publishers, 521 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10175, 1986, 174 pp.

Determining proper medical treatment and whether to treat and how to treat child cancer patients calls for a consideration of ethical, familial, and human values, as well as an appreciation of the laws that govern medical practice and define protections afforded patients. This book focuses on the human values involved in decision making about the care and treatment of child cancer patients. The volume consists of a series of essays by 16 medical and legal professionals, organized in 2 parts. Part 1 deals with issues in clinical research and Part 2, which comprises the bulk of the book, addresses issues in patient care. Succinct and well written, the book is recommended not only for medical and legal professionals, but also for parents confronted with medical choices for a child suffering with cancer.

Required medical choices that are discussed include nutritional support, life support, prolonged therapy, as well as experimental forms of treatment. Additional concerns expressed deal with issues of informed consent and confidentiality. The book also provides guidelines in deciding how to provide medical care to children with cancer—the manner of care most appropriate and ethical, considering the alternatives available, the cost-benefit ratio, and other factors pertinent to the individual child and family.

The forms of child cancer specifically addressed in the book include sickle-cell anemia, leukemia, and hemophilia. Special problems regarding specified diseases are discussed along with suggested possible solutions. Very helpful is the authors' use of case examples and hypotheticals to illustrate typical situations and to demonstrate the ethical concerns that arise in treatment delivery.

The tragedy of children stricken with cancer is discussed in a forthright, scientific manner, sometimes in terms that are beyond the average lay person, yet, other chapters contain such understandable explanations that they could serve as reference texts for parents. The book gives an overall perspective of the considerations involved and the (sometimes competing) roles of those involved in treating child cancer patients. The chapter devoted to legal issues in pediatric oncology particularly deals with situations where the doctor and parent may disagree about what is in the best interests of the child. The judiciary may be involved where conflicts arise in life-threatening situations. The controversial Chad Green case exemplifies the legal issues of the rights of minors to medical treatment, the parents' rights to consent or withhold consent, and the use of unorthodox therapy.

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The ethical considerations of the book go beyond those involving individual patients to include entire populations of children with specific diseases. Also included is an examination of societal values as demonstrated by the manner in which research is regulated via institutional review boards and the manner in which programs are funded. Clearly, this involves reviewing social, financial, and even political factors that impact on the availability and accessibility of health care for children with cancer. Ethics is no longer a private matter between patient/parent and physician.

Despite the somber topic, the tone of the book is very positive. The authors endorse the scientific model of cancer research and point to the favorable success rates in curing children. Enlightening and educational, the book is highly recommended for all who have concerns about the issue of the care of child cancer patients.