

Book Review

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Genetic Testing for Cancer: Psychological Approaches for Helping Patients and Families. By Andrea Farkas Patenaude. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2005. Pp. 312. \$59.95, hardcover.

Do not be misled by the title of this book, which suggests that its contents may be limited to the psychological aspects of cancer genetics. Rather, this book is a comprehensive review of cancer genetic counseling. In fact, only a couple of chapters—namely, chapter 4, “Emotional Baggage: Unresolved Grief, Emotional Distress, Risk Perception, and Health Beliefs and Behaviors,” and chapter 7, “A Family Matter”—actually deal in depth with the psychological issues surrounding cancer genetics and testing for hereditary predisposition. The remainder of the book is a methodical, thorough exposition of all aspects of cancer genetic counseling, including the historical aspects of cancer genetics, the most common cancer genetics syndromes, surveillance and prophylaxis, result interpretation, pedigree symbology, and what to expect from a genetic counseling visit, to name just a few topics. This is a book that can be equally instructional and informative for genetic counseling students, medical students, genetics fellows, and patients. The very versatility and readability of this book belies its solid and well-researched scientific, medical, and psychosocial exposition of the subject matter.

The author does a wonderful job of coalescing the multifaceted field of hereditary cancer risk assessment into a cogent synopsis. Chapter 5, “Opening Pandora’s Box: Disclosure of the Results of Cancer Genetic Testing,” deals with the de rigeur topics of guilt and depression but also delves into some important, yet rarely addressed, matters in cancer genetic counseling, such as somatization and the falsification of family history information. Chapter 6, “Prophylactic Surgery,” is especially informative and comprehensive, and the author thoughtfully discusses this oftentimes difficult subject with candor and sensitivity.

There is something in this book for everyone from graduate students to veteran hereditary cancer practitioners. All will find something useful in this book, which will be a tremendous resource for genetic counseling and medical genetics training programs and which should definitely be part of the curricula for oncology training programs.

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