



Doing Right: A Practical Guide to Ethics for Physicians and Medical Trainees

Philip C. Hébert. 220 pp. Oxford University Press, Oxford, England; Oxford University Press Canada, Don Mills, Ont. 1996. \$19.95. ISBN 0-19-541104-8

Overall rating:	Very good
Strengths:	Liberal use of illustrative cases, appealing format and appropriate vocabulary for medical trainees and physicians
Weaknesses:	Gives the impression that ethical decisions are more certain than they often are and does not emphasize reasoning skills as much as it should
Audience:	Medical students, residents and practising physicians

Philip Hébert promises “a practical guide to ethics for medical trainees and physicians” and succeeds in fulfilling his promise. Teaching in a medical school requires sensitivity to the goals of the students. They are not in school to become philosophers but ethically sound physicians. Teaching of ethics must be relevant to clinical practice, as this book is.

The great strength of this book is its accessibility. Because of their academic backgrounds as well as the demands of medical school, medical students find abstract philosophical readings difficult and often simply do not read them. The format of Hébert’s book, its vocabulary and its very liberal use and discussion of common cases ensure that students will read it, understand it and become interested in it.

Although the author does not cover all issues in bioethics, he deals with enough issues that the principles used could clearly be applied to the examination of other problems. I particularly liked the chapters on justice

in medical care and on end-of-life issues. I found the discussion comprehensive and balanced. For those who believe that a “principle” approach is not the best way to approach medical ethics, however, this book may not be for them.

There are 2 weaknesses of the book, both of which the author acknowledges. Hébert’s discussion of the cases, although useful, may give the reader the impression that his conclusion is the right one. Although I agree with him most of the time, there are instances in which I do not. This is, of course, typical of ethical discussions. Indeed, he says in the introduction, “Nor should my opinions be taken as the right answer. In the ethical problems of real life — as in medicine generally — decisions are fraught with uncertainty, and even the seemingly best choice may have reasonable alternatives. I encourage you to develop your own opinions on the cases.” As well, the short, snappy discussions of the issues, although appealing and easy to read, may not encourage the contemplation and reasoning skills so necessary to good ethical decision-making. Again, however, Hébert suggests that *Doing Right* should be used in conjunction with other readings to avoid this pitfall.

If this book is used with Hébert’s suggestion in mind, it is a very useful addition to any undergraduate or postgraduate curriculum in biomedical ethics. Good ethical decision-making, like good decision-making of any sort in medicine, results from theoretical knowledge applied to relevant examples, good reasoning skills and a great deal of reflection.

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The Physicians’ Legal Manual

Edited by Sandra B. Kidd. 573 pp. Emond Montgomery Publications, Toronto. 1996. Distributed by the Canadian Medical Association, Ottawa. \$57.95 (\$49.95 CMA members). ISBN 0-920722-79-2

Overall rating:	Good
Strengths:	Practical advice on legal matters for Canadian physicians; simple language, easy-to-access information and up-to-date references
Weaknesses:	Some points need further explanation
Audience:	All Canadian physicians

This manual is much needed. It strips away the mystery of the laws, statutes, regulations, bylaws and common law rules that govern the practice of physicians. It lists the specific actions the law demands of physicians and explains the expected actions and reactions of the other parties.

The book deals both with federal and provincial laws, some aspects of the public hospital statutes, the regulations affecting medical institutions and some bylaws that affect medical practice in academic, hospital, private and public milieu. The provincial laws are addressed individually in separate chapters. This allows busy physicians easy access to information for their province. Throughout, the authors remove the “legalese” and replace it with simple language that physicians can interpret quickly.

Each chapter is divided into subsections such as definition, legal liability, clinical practice guidelines and recommended actions. Further divisions and headings include the activities expected of various providers, such as physicians, surgeons, psychiatrists, nurses and hospitals. For situations in which decision-making may be legally damaging for the physician,