



comprehensive and a pleasure to read.

Writing clearly about end-of-life issues presents formidable challenges. Keeping track of the diverse meanings given to the term "euthanasia" is a major task in itself. Mullens meets these challenges admirably.

The greatest strength of Mullens' book lies in the way she puts a human face on the issues. The text moves gracefully from explanations of the conceptual distinctions found in law and ethics to illustrations of the way our current policies affect our fellow citizens. Sue Rodriguez' courageous legal battle brought the issue of assisted suicide home to many Canadians. By telling the stories of other Canadians, Mullens shows us that Rodriguez' plight was not unique and that the problems she faced have not gone away.

It is part of our folklore that traditional societies handled the death of elderly people better than we do, and often by means of assisted suicide. Mullens confronts this romantic view by recounting the death of Aleak Kolitalik, whose son and 2 nephews were the last people tried for assisting a suicide. The story reveals that the reality is much messier and more equivocal than the myth.

It is impossible to discuss the legalization of assisted death without referring to the Dutch experience. Unfortunately, so many contradictory claims are made about practices in the Netherlands that it is impossible to draw any conclusions about the effects of legalization. Mullens met this problem head on by living among the Dutch people for 6 weeks. She gives her readers a clear account of her first-hand observations. And she is a sophisticated observer, often asking her hosts precisely the right question. Although her account cannot resolve all of the conflicts, it does put to rest some concerns. Among these is the often-repeated, but never substantiated, claim that elderly people in the

Netherlands live in fear that their lives will be terminated without their consent.

Anyone interested in the ethical and legal issues surrounding the care of the dying will profit from reading *Timely Death*. It is hard to forget the personal narratives found there.

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**Consultations
in Gastroenterology**

Edited by William J. Snape Jr. 949 pp. Illust. WB Saunders Company/Harcourt Brace and Company, Philadelphia; WB Saunders Canada, Toronto. 1996. \$182. ISBN 0-7216-4670-0

Overall rating: Excellent
Strengths: Practical and well written; provides rational guidance for the treatment of most gastrointestinal problems
Weaknesses: Articles vary in depth and detail
Audience: Gastroenterologists and general internists

This is an excellent desktop reference for practising clinical gastroenterologists or general internists whose practice focuses on gastrointestinal diseases. It covers a broad range of specific clinical problems in gastroenterology and liver disease that are referred to consultants. The focus is on therapy; pathophysiology and disease mechanisms are discussed only in relation to therapeutic options or decisions. The individual articles are easy to read, interesting and well documented. Algorithms are provided when appropriate. The editor intended that the book "should fill the niche between multi-volume encyclopedic reviews of disease processes and the annual how-to manuals for treatment."

As with any textbook with many authors, the style and depth of content varies from one chapter to another. Some broad and difficult topics, such as the management of diarrhea, are covered superficially, whereas chapters that refer to specific problems or symptoms, such as fecal incontinence, are superb. These topics are rarely well covered in classic textbooks and are the principal value of this new book.

The roster of authors and contributors is uniformly excellent. Of interest for Canadian gastroenterologists is the large number of Canadians among the contributors, including Charles Bernstein, Perry R. Gray and Gerald Y. Minuk from Winnipeg; Laurence Blendis and Florence Wong from Toronto; Kenneth L. Bowes and Henryk Pluta from Edmonton; Ghislain Devroede and Alain Watier from Sherbrooke, Que.; and Dilip Patel and W. Grant Thompson from Ottawa.

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Overall rating: Very good
Strengths: Can replace up to 27 medical textbooks at a comparable price; efficient search engine