



The Human Radiation Experiments: Final Report of the Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments

620 pp. Oxford University Press, Oxford, England; Oxford University Press Canada, Don Mills, Ont. 1996. \$57.50. ISBN 0-19-510792-6

Overall rating: Excellent
Strengths: Comprehensive, detailed, authoritative and clearly written
Weaknesses: Restricted to US experiments and regulations
Audience: Members of research ethics boards, medical historians and researchers with an interest in ethics

During the Cold War, the US government used its own citizens as fodder for a wide variety of secret radiation experiments. The studies included injecting inpatients with plutonium, administering radioactive tracers to children living in institutions, exposing patients who were terminally ill with cancer to total-body irradiation, irradiating the testicles of prisoners, putting soldiers in close proximity to atomic-bomb blasts and intentionally releasing radioactivity into the environment. The extraordinary tale of these experiments, and their implications for the conduct of research today, is detailed in this report.

To understand the genesis of these experiments, and to judge them fairly, we have to look back to the early days of the Cold War. At the time, many in the US government thought that nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union was inevitable. Little was known about the effects of radiation on humans, and there was substantial concern for the safety of workers in the rapidly expanding nuclear industry. Also, radiation seemed to hold great promise as a tool for scientific inquiry and medical therapy.

What went wrong? It is clear from the detailed analysis of individual experiments that most of the studies placed subjects at minimal risk. Much of the harm stemmed from the veil of secrecy surrounding experiments conducted in the name of national security. Subjects were often not informed about the true nature of the experiments because aspects of the research were classified. Even when subjects were informed, though, disclosure was often inadequate as a result of the investigators' and institutions' ignorance of the rules governing research at the time, which were contained in the Nuremberg Code.

What lessons can we learn? Since Canada is now revising its own guidelines governing research, this is a timely question. Although the book is devoted exclusively to US research, Canada's involvement in mind-control experiments funded by the US Central Intelligence Agency in the 1950s, and, more recently, in placebo research in psychiatry indicates that we too are willing to sacrifice individual research subjects to the "greater good." One lesson from the radiation experiments is that informed consent alone is inadequate protection for study participants. Research ethics boards must ensure that studies are scientifically sound and offer a favourable balance of benefits and risks before potential subjects are approached for consent.

Research conducted in the interest of national security poses problems that have received little consideration to date. If aspects of research are secret, how can they be reviewed for ethical and scientific acceptability? Similarly, how can subjects be informed adequately? Perhaps special research ethics boards composed entirely of members with security clearance must be constituted to review such studies. Indeed, research sub-

jects themselves may require security clearance to be informed properly. The ultimate lesson from the radiation experiments is that even secret research cannot be exempt from the rules that guide the proper conduct of research.

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Birth to Death: Science and Bioethics

Edited by David C. Thomasma and Thomasine Kushner. 382 pp. Illust. Cambridge University Press, New York. 1996. US\$64.95. ISBN 0-521-46297-5

Overall rating: Good
Strengths: Well written, succinct; diverse and important topics
Weaknesses: Few illustrative cases; US focus; not practical enough
Audience: Premedical students or students taking an introductory course in medical ethics

Advances in biomedical technology seem to many to outpace society's capacity to manage and control their social and ethical implications. From sheep cloning to new reproductive technologies to the aggressive interventions undertaken in intensive care units, medical technology and engineering seem to have lives of their own, driving patient care in unforeseen directions. Can we harness such technology, or are we its slaves?

The editors introduce this collection of essays with the suggestion that we need to rethink "cherished values about the moral status of animals, children, the dying, the mentally compromised, and . . . those who are



healthy.” This in turn should lead to reflections on the nature of personhood and the virtues and moral theories that we need to espouse. These are ambitious goals. The editors see scientific discoveries as challenging our basic values and hope their book will help educated readers deal more openly with the issues raised by the new medical culture.

Certainly, this book covers a diverse range of topics, from “birth to death”: genetics, new reproductive technologies, neonatal care, transplantation, aging, dying, euthanasia, medical research and the environment. Each section begins with a scientific sketch of the area and ends with several articles on the ethical issues involved. Many of the contributing authors are well known: Dan Callaghan, Eric Casell, Ronald Cranford, Raanon Gillon, Al Jonsen and Robert Levine. The best written and informative section is that on human medical research; the poorest and least comprehensive sections are those on transplantation and the environment. The section on transplantation has a lot to say about paying for organs and almost nothing to say about scarce resource allocation. The essays are, unfortunately, largely American in focus.

The scope of the ethical articles tends to be general, and there is little empirical content. These articles would be most helpful as introductory material for those with little or no familiarity with the topics. Many topics commonly discussed in medical ethics textbooks — truth telling, confidentiality and consent — are missing here. Although the editors acknowledge the importance of moral theory in grappling with the difficult issues of modern medicine, there is a surprising lack of discussion of it. Readers must look elsewhere for such direction.

Birth to Death also lacks case discussion and the application of moral theory to real patient problems,

which is often the most difficult aspect of medical ethics. This omission makes it difficult to know whether these essays would help general readers exert more control over the influence of medical technology in everyday life. Readers will gain familiarity with the topics, but the aims of the book are only partially fulfilled.

There are many collections of essays on medical ethics. *Birth to Death* can be recommended as a helpful and succinct introduction to important topics in advanced technologic medicine; it gives readers up-to-date knowledge of these topics and covers the ethical issues in a general way. However, it contains little moral reflection and little concern with the resolution of ethical dilemmas. It is most appropriate for premedical students or as a textbook for an introductory course in medical ethics.

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What to Do in a Paediatric Emergency

Ian Higginson, David Montgomery and Phil Munro. 48 pp. Illust. BMJ Publishing Group, London. 1996. Distributed in Canada by the Canadian Medical Association, Ottawa. \$38.95 (\$31.95 CMA members). ISBN 0-7279-1032-9

Overall rating:	Fair to good
Strengths:	Puts together the basics; reasonably readable and easily portable
Weaknesses:	Some lapses in information and some misinformation
Audience:	General practice physicians and junior residents

This 48-page manual is aimed at guiding the management of paediatric emergencies on the basis of the recommendations of the UK Advanced Life Support Group.

The manual provides a basic review of the stabilization and emergency management of children. The authors have selected reasonable, but not comprehensive, scenarios. The basics are appropriately reiterated in each section. However, the authors neglected to include some common scenarios, such as near-drowning, head and cervical spine injury, and drug overdose. There is an overemphasis on some of the cardiac arrhythmias, particularly since ventricular fibrillation and ventricular tachycardia are uncommon in critically ill children.

The authors make effective use of tables, flow charts and simple illustrations. These are well placed and easy to follow. A section on practical procedures is very helpful. However, the section includes such procedures as femoral nerve block and saphenous cutdown, yet neglects to give basic guidelines on the materials and technique required to provide intubation in a child.

I have some concerns about some of the information in the text, which is misplaced, missing or misleading. The following are a few examples.

- The manual fails to mention that, in a patient with asthma, a low saturation should prompt the physician to perform a chest radiograph to rule out pneumonia or pneumothorax.
- The use of intravenously administered phenobarbital in patients with acute seizures is well substantiated, yet it is not included in the flow chart of drugs to be used in the management of status epilepticus.
- The use of diagnostic peritoneal lavage in children is discussed, despite the fact that its use is exceptionally rare.

The information in the manual is generally relevant and easy to use. I believe that the target audience for this manual includes general practitioners who need a quick reference



before contacting specialists for more expert advice and junior residents who need a quick reminder of the basic principles before checking a more comprehensive source.

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Books and other media received

Livres et autres documents reçus

Books for patients

"Mr. Rossi, You've Just Had a Heart Attack!" How a Heart Attack Changed My Life. James R. Ferlisi. 192 pp. Illust. Blueberry Communications Inc., Maple, Ont. 1996. \$24.95. ISBN 0-9680161-0-3

Cardiology

Preventing Illness Among People with Coronary Heart Disease. Edited by John D. Piette, Robert M. Kaplan and Joseph R. Ferrari. *Prevention and Intervention in the Community* series. 200 pp. Harworth Press, Inc., New York. 1996. US\$34.95. ISBN 0-7890-0006-7

Dermatology

Clinical Dermatology. 4th ed. Rona M. MacKie. 324 pp. Illust. Oxford University Press, Oxford, England; Oxford University Press Canada, Don Mills, Ont. 1997. \$48.95. ISBN 0-19-2627619

Health care

Être ou ne pas être en bonne santé : Biologie et déterminants sociaux de la

maladie. Rédacteurs : Robert G. Evans, Morris L. Barer et Theodore R. Marmor. 358 pp. Illust. Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, Montréal. 1996. Prix non mentionné. ISBN 2-7606-1684-3

Health and Social Organization: Towards a Health Policy for the Twenty-first Century. Edited by David Blane, Eric Brunner and Richard Wilkinson. 326 pp. Illust. Routledge, New York. 1996. \$97.95, hardcover; \$27.95, paperback. ISBN 0-415-13069-7, hardcover; ISBN 0-415-13070-0, paperback

Health Care Systems in Liberal Democracies. Edited by Ann Wall. 210 pp. Routledge, New York. 1996. \$83.95, hardcover; \$24.95, paperback. ISBN 0-415-11806-9, hardcover; ISBN 0-415-11807-7, paperback

The Pocket Guide to Critical Appraisal: A Handbook for Health Care Professionals. Iain K. Crombie. 66 pp. BMJ Publishing Group, London. 1996. Distributed in Canada by the Canadian Medical Association, Ottawa. \$28.95 (\$23.95 CMA members). ISBN 0-7279-1099-X

HIV/AIDS

AIDS in the World II: Global Dimensions, Social Roots, and Responses. Edited by Jonathan M. Mann and Daniel J.M. Tarantola. 616 pp. Illust. Oxford University Press, Oxford, England; Oxford University Press Canada, Don Mills, Ont. 1996. \$42.95. ISBN 0-19-508994-4

Laboratory medicine

Molecular Diagnostics: For the Clinical Laboratorian. Edited by William B. Coleman and Gregory J. Tsongalis. 390 pp. Illust. Humana Press, Totowa, NJ. 1997. US\$79.50. ISBN 0-89603-373-2

Neurology

Clinical Handbook of Sleep Disorders.

Antonio Culebras. 524 pp. Illust. Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd., Oxford, England; Butterworth-Heinemann, Boston. 1996. US\$47.50. ISBN 0-7506-9644-3

Clinical Neurology of Rheumatic Diseases. Richard B. Rosenbaum, Stephen M. Campbell and James T. Rosenbaum. 436 pp. Illust. Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd., Oxford, England; Butterworth-Heinemann, Boston. 1996. US\$95. ISBN 0-7506-9613-3

Pocket Companion to Neurology in Clinical Practice. 2nd ed. Edited by Walter G. Bradley, Robert B. Daroff, Gerald M. Fenichel and C. David Marsden. 758 pp. Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd., Oxford, England; Butterworth-Heinemann, Boston. 1996. US\$45. ISBN 0-7506-9787-3

Pharmacology

Neurotoxic Side Effects of Prescription Drugs. John C.M. Brust. 435 pp. Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd., Oxford, England; Butterworth-Heinemann, Boston. 1996. US\$40. ISBN 0-7506-9663-X

Physiology

Textbook of Endocrine Physiology. 3rd ed. Edited by James E. Griffin and Sergio R. Ojeda. 396 pp. Illust. Oxford University Press, Oxford, England; Oxford University Press Canada, Don Mills, Ont. 1996. \$40. ISBN 0-19-510754-3

Rehabilitation

Medical Management of Long-Term Disability. 2nd ed. Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago. Edited by David Green. 351 pp. Illust. Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd., Oxford, England; Butterworth-Heinemann, Boston. 1996. US\$75. ISBN 0-7506-9604-4