

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of Law and Medical Ethics, Second edition

REFERENCE: Mason, J. K. and McCall Smith, A., *Law and Medical Ethics, Second edition*, Butterworth and Co., 88 Kingsway, London, 1987, 344 pp.

The authors of this discourse on a subject which has spawned lengthy discussions for both physician and attorney characterize this work as a handbook on the subject. They do not elaborate by whom they intend it to be so used, and I am at a loss to conceive as to its use as such by anyone interested in the field. It is clearly aimed at an audience outside the United States, mostly in the United Kingdom and, therefore, has little use for physicians and interested parties in this country for other than an introductory text on the subject.

The work devotes under 300 pages to this topic, of which libraries have been written on each of the topics covered. I would recommend the text, for that is what it is rather than a handbook, to a person who has little knowledge of the concerns that a physician may have with the law. It is not limited to what is considered to be ethics only, but becomes involved with the questions of malpractice and psychiatry as used in a criminal matter. The traditional ethical areas of consideration of euthanasia, experimentation, and abortion are discussed quite well for the space devoted.

The authors do not require the reader to jump from section to section to develop a topic but remain within the section's topic area. This makes the organization clear and allows the reader to select the topic of interest and not read the entire book to get the information wanted. While cases and research of others is clearly and carefully cited in footnotes, the reader does not have to muddle through scores of footnotes to obtain the meat of the text. I find this very refreshing as too many authors of scholarly texts tend to use lengthy textual footnotes and distract the reader from the topic at hand. The organization of this work shows the authors' concern to put the topic forward and in a format that is easily understood.

This book shows the British viewpoint of how the legal system interacts with the medical and how the authors view ethical concepts which arise during the practice of medicine. No real answers are given, but perhaps, with a subject such as ethics none should be forthcoming. The material does get one to think of the problem areas and gives direction where none has been established by statute or rules of a governing medical body. Perhaps an awareness that a concern exists gives rise to an ethical resolution itself.

The student of ethics within the practice of medicine would find this book interesting and it would be of value as a text to introduce these topics. I cannot recommend its use as a handbook for the practitioner nor could I recommend anyone relying upon its material outside of the United Kingdom. The book is limited in scope in that it gives light coverage to problems of concern to the medical community today and does little more than get the mental process started on many of the subjects covered.

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