

SPRINGER BRIEFS IN ETHICS

Daniel K. Sokol

Doing Clinical Ethics

A Hands-on Guide
for Clinicians and
Others

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...an admirably short and clear guide to doing medical ethics... I welcome this book and urge medical students and doctors of all grades to read it in paper, on-line, or on their portable screen reader.

From the Foreword by Sir Richard
Thompson, President of the Royal
College of Physicians, UK

Dr. Sokol has provided the field with a much needed, easy and comprehensive tool on 'doing' clinical ethics that all should have in their back pockets.

Dr. Nneka Mokwunye, Director of Bioethics,
Washington Hospital Center, Washington
DC, USA

This is a magnificent guide to clinical ethics and reflects the author's very well known and widely respected academic gravitas and real life experience in clinical ethics. It is a must read for anyone involved in the field.

Mr. Vassilios Papalois, Consultant Surgeon
and Chairman, Imperial College Healthcare
NHS Trust Clinical Ethics Committee, UK

For Sam

Foreword

Dr. Sokol is a senior lecturer in medical ethics who, for some years, has studied and taught the subject at Imperial College London and other institutions. As a result, he has written an admirably short and clear guide to *doing* medical ethics, aimed at medical students and practising clinicians. In this guide, the difficult but fundamental vocabulary of beneficence and maleficence, etc. is explained (or, in my mind, doing good and doing harm) in an effort to provide quick but reasoned answers at the coal face.

Many clinicians are turned off by ethical problems, probably because they are often much less clear-cut than those of a clinical nature. As Dr. Sokol says, there are often several right answers to an ethical problem, which is why he emphasises that this is a personal guide. Clinicians, on the other hand, are taught necessarily to decide quickly on one course of action that, at a given moment, seems to be in the best interests of the patient.

Perhaps some of us are also put off by those serious, even deep, discussions, on and off the media, of clinical examples. These are usually discussed by thoughtful (can one be too thoughtful?) and probably highly intelligent ethicists, who seem to make difficult decisions more difficult, and soon slip into philosophy. This sits uneasily with rapid clinical decision making. Many hospitals have a standing committee available to help resolve less urgent problems but, when decisions are not straightforward, most of our advice is obtained from experienced nurses and colleagues, and from families and carers.

This book is engagingly written, devoid of abstruse philosophy, and rich in practical, down-to-earth advice. There are also useful chapters on writing about medical ethics, teaching ethics, and asking for ethical permission to carry out clinical research, topics that are not usually found in textbooks.

I welcome this book and urge medical students and doctors of all grades to read it in paper, on-line, or on their portable screen reader. Dr. Sokol talks about one's ethical brain, or, as I see it, an ethical elf always sitting on one's shoulder and watching. It can be trained by considering problems and discussing them with the elves of friends and colleagues and, of course, by a careful reading of this book.

My only regret is that he did not digress into the ethical controversy of the day, namely assisted dying, but I hope that will be for another book!

London, August 2011

Sir Richard Thompson
President, Royal College of Physicians

Acknowledgments

I wrote most of this book in Aix-en-Provence, in the south of France. My mother, a chef to rival Paul Bocuse, sustained me with sumptuous meals during the long days at the keyboard. My father, as well as reviewing the manuscript, dragged me onto the tennis court to prevent muscle atrophy from prolonged sitting. And Sam, my ever-patient wife, adopted a laid-back *Provençal* attitude, and cheerfully left me to my solitary work. To them all, I am grateful.

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