

**Concepts in Oncology Therapeutics, 2nd edition.**

Finley RS, Balmer C, editors. American Society of Health-System Pharmacists Inc.,

Bethesda, Maryland, 1998.

Softcover, 424 pages. US\$76.00.

This book walks the reader through 20 chapters of oncology basics. Pharmacists beginning an oncology practice would benefit from reading it, and it would also be appropriate for pharmacists wishing to review the fundamental concepts of cancer therapy and for those with a general interest in cancer. The pharmacy programs of many Canadian universities do not include a great deal of didactic instruction on oncology therapeutics, and this book can eloquently fill in the gaps.

This book has 3 notable strengths: its scope, its explanation of mechanisms, and its emphasis on the role of the pharmacist.

The scope encompasses both clinical and administrative issues by discussing not only the disease, available treatments, and complications, but also safe handling of therapeutic agents, chemotherapy checking, and drug information resources. The book discusses issues ranging from the mutation of a single cell to palliative and hospice care. The user-friendly format includes a table of contents, an index, complete references, a glossary, and good chapter organization (including defined objectives and self-assessment questions).

The detailed explanation of mechanisms is especially useful. Pathophysiology is explained in simple terms. The mechanisms of drug action are specified and often depicted in diagrams. The mechanisms of toxicity and complications are also defined. This book refreshingly answers the question "Why?"

Finally, the book appropriately emphasizes the role of the pharmacist in oncology. Concepts of

pharmaceutical care are integrated into the discussion, and specific tasks that should be included in the role of the oncology pharmacist are described throughout.

The 2 main weaknesses of this book are its American content and its lack of recent data. American units of measure are used throughout, and conversions to SI units are not provided, even in the fine print or footnotes. The safe-handling guidelines do not include the latest Worker's Compensation Board changes. Drugs that are not readily available in the United States but are commonly used in Canada, such as raltitrexed and clodronate, are not even mentioned. The section on Internet sites with cancer information resources does not list any Canadian links. Since the publication of this book 2 years ago, there have obviously been some developments in cancer therapy that could not possibly have been included. This limitation must be kept in mind, especially in relation to the standard therapies for the common cancers presented.

Overall, this book provides an excellent background for oncology therapeutics. It deals with a wide range of issues, answers many questions about mechanisms, and offers clear suggestions of what pharmacists can do in cancer care. As long as the American content and the date of the material are kept in perspective, this is a worthwhile reference for any hospital pharmacy that provides care to cancer patients and for any pharmacist who wishes to fill in those oncology gaps that remain after formal training.

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