

The Handbook of Palliative Care.

Faull C, Carter Y, Woof R, editors. Blackwell Science Ltd, Malden, Massachusetts, 1998. Softcover, 416 pages. US\$39.95.

This book provides a broad overview of issues specific to palliative care. It covers a wide range of topics, from the history and principles of palliative care, communication skills, and ethical issues, to the specific symptoms experienced during terminal illness. The discussion of symptom management focuses on the care of patients in the terminal phase of cancer. However, 2 chapters address symptoms related to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) and motor neurone disease (such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis). There is also a chapter on palliative care in children.

The chapter devoted to medicines management in palliative care attempts to define the role of the pharmacist as

a key team member. The considerable discussion around the issue of providing medicines for terminally ill patients in the community is applicable to the Canadian health-care system. Availability of medications upon discharge from hospital can be a significant problem for many patients receiving palliative care, and the authors provide some helpful suggestions for bridging the gap between hospital and community. The review of compliance aids is also useful. However, the discussion about prescribing and dispensing controlled drugs applies only to the National Health System in the United Kingdom.

I found that the chapter on communication skills presents an excellent overview, although it appears to have been



written primarily for physicians and nurses. It provides some helpful suggestions for dealing with specific issues that frequently arise when communicating with a terminally ill individual. The chapter dealing with adapting to death, dying, and bereavement should assist pharmacists in understanding some of the psychological and social issues that dying patients face. The ethics chapter is of interest but focuses primarily on the question of euthanasia (both active and passive) and covers other issues only in a superficial manner.

The chapters dealing with specific symptoms generally provide helpful information regarding medication choices and dosing ranges. Most chapters have diagrams to explain the pathophysiology of each symptom and illustrate an algorithmic approach to treatment. The only difficulty is that some of the medication choices are specific to the United Kingdom.

Generally, hospital pharmacists working in palliative care or oncology will find this book a useful addition to their current references. It should complement, but not replace, other references in this area.

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