

Book Review

Psychosocial Palliative Care By William S. Breitbart and Yesne Alici. Oxford University Press, New York, 2014, 192 pages, ISBN: 9780199917402, Cost £32.99

In the almost 50 years since the emergence of the original British hospice movement, the palliative care body of knowledge has continuously grown. Perhaps, one of the areas where the development has been most impressive has been that of psychosocial care. Interdisciplinary teams frequently have a psychologist and/or psychiatrist capable of delivering sophisticated assessment and counseling and/or pharmacological interventions. However, the vast majority of patients receiving palliative care will not have access to such level of sophisticated care. In most cases palliative care will be delivered by a small team of palliative care clinicians and/or primary care physicians.

There have been quite a few comprehensive treatises on primary care and/or psychosocial care. However, most of those books are excessively lengthy for bedside clinicians delivering primary palliative care, until now. Breitbart and Alici have done an outstanding job of summarizing all the major concepts of psychosocial palliative care in 170 pages. This is a two-author book throughout. It maintains the same style in all chapters, and this makes the reading easy and enjoyable. The book is divided into three main sections: modern palliative care, psychiatric disorders in the palliative care setting, and psychosocial issues in the palliative care setting. There are a total of 14 chapters written in a way that each of them is self-standing. They all have appropriate and up-to-date references.

The first two sections of the book cover important information regarding the development of palliative care, professional roles, and the major psychiatric disorders. These are all very well done, but they are also arguably available in other resources. The third section on psychosocial issues in the palliative care setting is truly outstanding, and it covers, in a simple but highly empowering way, all the major aspects of psychosocial care. The authors not only cover multiple psychotherapy interventions but they also address major and sensitive issues such as spiritual and existential issues as well as cross-cultural issues. At the end of the book, the authors have included a number of resources including books and websites for further education of the readers as well as a very useful and innovative list of certificate training programs and palliative care organizations.

This book is an outstanding contribution by two talented and compassionate colleagues. By reading this book, I was once more reminded of the giant contribution made by Bill Breitbart to psychosocial palliative care and psycho-oncology overall. This book should be present in the library of every single clinician delivering palliative care.

Eduardo Bruera, MD

*Department of Palliative, Rehabilitation & Integrative
Medicine, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer
Center, Houston, TX, USA*

Email: ebruera@mdanderson.org

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