

## Book Review

**Safe Passage: A Global Spiritual Sourcebook for Care at the End of Life.** Edited by M. Lazenby, R. McCorkle and D. Sulmasy Oxford University Press, United Kingdom. 320 pages. ISBN: 9780199914630. Price: £35.99 (UK).

Safe Passage is an ambitious edited text about a universal aspect of human existence: the end of life. Written for a broad audience across disciplines, cultures and settings, the book delivers a scholarly treatise about clinical and spiritual care before, at and after the time of death. The list of contributors is extensive and impressive. Most importantly, the book challenges the reader to think more deeply not only about the experience of those we care for who are confronting death but also to reflect on the personal.

The book is broadly organised into two substantive sections. The first section overviews clinical and spiritual care at the time of death. Taking a global perspective, chapters are organised around continents and regions. It is indeed refreshing that the book takes this wide and inclusive scope, covering North and South America, Africa, Europe, India, the Asia Pacific and the Middle East. These in essence are review chapters that provide a history of the development of palliative and end-of-life care and set these histories in the context of the cultures, settings and the religious traditions that are relevant to health care and to death. These are invaluable narratives that allow the reader to quickly obtain an overview of current practices and healthcare implications, and I would expect these to be of great interest to workers in the field, health agencies across sectors and religious organisations, as well as the curious and informed lay reader.

Interlinking to the second section, Chapter 9 focuses on integrating spiritual care into the clinical setting. To do this, the author presents a spiritual and compassionate care model to (1) identify spiritual distress and patient strength; (2) integrate a spiritual care plan into clinical care; and (3) practice a compassionate presence. Practical advice on taking a spiritual history is provided along with taxonomy of spiritual diagnoses. While I found applying diagnostic categories to spiritual concerns somewhat at odds with the overall tone of the text, I appreciate the political value of using this language in a healthcare setting that values

this approach. The discussion here of compassion as not only an attitude to others but moreover as a way of being and an act of love provides a thoughtful segue to considering the personal.

The second section (Chapter 10 and beyond) presents five case studies that cover clinical situations of sudden death, disease progression and prolonged death that invite the reader to consider the embodied spiritual patient within their cultural, spiritual and familial context. The case studies are compelling and realistic, and I expect many readers will be able to relate these scenarios to their own clinical experience and perhaps even their personal experiences. Each case study contains within it a clinical dilemma, spanning decisions about organ donation, when to stop medical treatment that may be futile, finding meaning in loss and care in the context of social inequity and stigma. Spiritual commentators from 13 different traditions review each case study and provide responses that clarify the cultural and spiritual meaning, values and relationships that would need to be considered. The traditions included are diverse, including Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish and Indigenous approaches, with responses considering the differing cultural approaches to death and to loss and bereavement.

In conclusion, after reading this text it would be difficult to not think more deeply about the illness experiences of those in our care and hopefully from this interact more compassionately with people facing life-threatening illnesses. Specifically, this detailed and thoughtful consideration of different cultural approaches to death and dying has relevance for oncology across the illness trajectory and from the point of illness detection onwards. Safe passage has broad appeal, is written in an accessible and engaging manner and is an excellent resource for the oncology healthcare professional, teacher and researcher.

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