

# Reviews

## ABC of Medical Law

Lorraine Corfield, Ingrid Granne & William Latimer-Sayer  
Wiley–Blackwell, 2009, £19.99 pb, 64 pp.  
ISBN 9781405176286

A knowledge and understanding of medical law is now expected from doctors working in all medical specialties. For example, the Mental Capacity Act 2005, introduced in 2007, is far-reaching and places any healthcare decision involving a patient who may lack capacity within a legal framework. The Mental Health Act 1983, of obvious importance to psychiatrists, often requires involvement from general practitioners (GPs) but also from doctors in other specialties, particularly with regard to emergency sections in the general hospital setting. And recent media attention on assisted dying has renewed debate about the legal position on this complex ethical issue. With this in mind, the title suggested that this book would be timely, and I opened the attractively slim volume with interest.

The book proclaims to provide a 'concise overview of the most salient aspects of law as it affects day-to-day medical practice'. It contains 12 chapters, starting with an excellent overview of the legal system, going on to cover many of the areas you would expect, including: consent; refusal of treatment; negligence; confidentiality; and withholding and withdrawing treatment. It does this well. Each succinct chapter

begins with an overview of the subject and good use is made of boxes and figures to supplement the main body of text. Important cases that have set precedent are described, with key points and examples used to show applicability of law to clinical practice. Some topics are particularly well-covered, the section on advance refusals springing to mind.

The notable omission of a chapter on the Mental Health Act was perplexing. The ABC series is described as 'an outstanding collection of resources – written by specialists for non-specialists'. Even so, many 'non-specialists' in mental health are likely to stumble upon mental health law at some stage in their medical career. Surely it deserves a mention? The book, published in 2009, also fails to mention the Mental Capacity Act Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) – relevant to psychiatrists, GPs and hospital doctors alike – that were introduced in the same year.

So, does the *ABC of Medical Law* do what it says it does? The answer to this would be a clear yes, if only the missing chapter on mental health law and a section on DoLS could be found!

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## A Clinician's Guide to Using Light Therapy

Raymond W. Lam & Edwin M. Tam  
Cambridge University Press, 2009, £27.00 pb, 172 pp.  
ISBN 9780521697682

Written records about the idea of seasonal fluctuations in well-being have existed since 400 BC. Research has shown that light therapy is beneficial in patients with seasonal affective disorder<sup>1</sup> but most clinicians have little experience of using it as a treatment in their clinical practice. This practical book will help clinicians to understand both seasonal affective disorder and light therapy. It is well organised, each chapter beginning with a list of topics covered, and with tables, clinical examples and tips to facilitate a better understanding of the main concepts.

As it can be challenging to diagnose seasonal affective disorder, the authors begin with its definition and criteria to differentiate it from major depressive episode and other related conditions. The mechanism of light therapy is well explained and the advantages and disadvantages of various types of light devices are discussed. The book covers different conditions that light therapy can be used for as well as rare

side-effects. It ends with information on rating scales that might be useful in patients with seasonal affective disorder, and online resources for further information.

Although it is difficult to obtain randomised control studies on a treatment such as light therapy, the authors mention meta-analyses that have shown that morning light therapy is a well-validated, evidence-based treatment for seasonal affective disorder. What I found interesting is that response to light therapy can be very rapid, with an immediate energising effect of bright light and improvement in depressive symptoms starting within a week. Light therapy could be a good treatment option in specific population groups, such as in pregnant women with depression, for whom a non-pharmacological treatment might be preferable.

Overall, this is a useful book for those who would like to better understand the practical applications of light therapy.

1 Eagles JM. Light therapy and the management of winter depression. *Adv Psychiatr Treat* 2004; **10**: 233–40.

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