

Book review

Medical Treatment: Decisions and the Law



Editor: Christopher Johnston QC
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There is no doubt a time and a place for the careful study of academic texts on medical law and ethics, but that is not in the offices of professional legal practitioners with critical deadlines looming.

At the other end of the spectrum, in those same offices, there should never be a place in our post-truth, alternative-fact world, for the desperate internet search undertaken to illuminate an unlearned point of law or procedure (although of course the internet has some role—even the book which is the subject of this review gives us a link to *Wikipedia* for the views of Jehovah's witnesses on the use of blood in treatment).

Ideal middle ground

Fortunately, in the third edition of what is a very fine practitioners' guide, those acting in this field will find the ideal middle ground. This excellent update has been produced by no less than 23 members of Serjeants' Inn, one of the pre-eminent chambers in the medical law specialty, under the editorial guidance of Christopher Johnston QC. It is to his enormous credit that despite the number of contributors, he has produced a book which speaks with a single voice and a consistency of tone throughout.

Stylish influence

If the book finds its style through the influence of its editor, it is through the involvement of the contributors that it finds

its authority. The names are so well known and so active in their field, that one wonders precisely when they have had the time to turn their hands to the necessary drafting. Of course, it is always easier to write about that which you live on a daily basis, rather than having to consider the merely theoretical. That is the fundamental point here: this is a book for practitioners written by practitioners. It is as close to granting the reader a free, direct advice-line to counsel, as the joint heads of Serjeants' Inn are ever likely to permit.

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And then there were three

As stated, this is now the third edition. The first was published in 2001 with a slender 321 pages but has been fully updated and comes in a rather fuller figure, with 744 pages. If that is a reflection of the expansion of this area of law over that period, it is even

more impressive that what we are left with is still a wonderfully user-friendly, quick reference guide. The chapters are nicely partitioned into the points of key interest and none feel as if they are carrying the excess weight of academic speculation. It is easily navigated, highly readable and therefore genuinely usable.

Content matters

In terms of content, the book is as up-to-date as could reasonably be expected. The topic coverage is comprehensive. The book opens with a very welcome run through issues of consent and proceeds into highly specialised chapters dealing with topics such as the treatment of suicidal patients, religious objections to treatment, sterilisation and feeding.

Genuine sensitivity

The reader will identify a genuine sensitivity in the discussion of these difficult subjects. There is also a useful chapter dealing with procedure and practice for those matters which require judicial determination, starting with guidance for determining the appropriate court for the issue. If an example of the level of practical detail provided is required, the author even advises the reader with whom the responsibility for typing up the order usually rests.

In the face of the relentless drive towards clear desks and paperless working-hubs (previously offices), it can be a difficult argument nowadays to justify the purchase of anything as “old hat” as a book. However, this time when you e-mail across the electronic purchase request form to buy in a copy of *Medical Treatment: Decisions and the Law*, you will not be exaggerating when you claim it is “essential”.

NLJ

Reviewer: David Locke

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