The importance of ethics in medical practice

Memoir of an accidental ethicist: on medical ethics, medical misconduct and challenges for the medical profession

Breen, KJ
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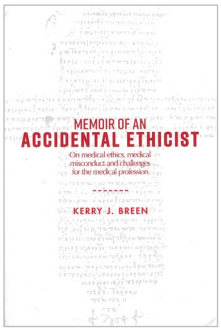

Memoir of an accidental ethicist is a well written book that will appeal to many doctors. Readers with an interest in medical ethics will find the book particularly engaging and useful. Although not every doctor needs to read this book, they certainly need to heed its messages and become ethicists, either accidentally, like the author, or by design.

Kerry Breen has written other books for medical professionals: on ethics, law, and things to consider if studying medicine in Australia. *Memoir of an accidental ethicist*, however, is more specific and provides a detailed account from the author's perspective of the developments in the regulation of medicine in Australia over the past four decades. Both at the outset and at the conclusion of the book, the author highlights not having received formal training in ethics and not being an ethicist per se. Nevertheless, the fascinating account Breen provides suggests otherwise.

The book is easy to read and the style of writing is direct, explaining processes and structures and the reasons behind various decisions. At the same time, the author injects sufficient personal opinion and insights to constantly prompt further questions and more in-depth deliberation. The book manages to cover a significant proportion of the landscape and deals with key issues in an Australian context, delving deeply into professional practice, the health of doctors, problems regarding their conduct both in clinical settings and in research, and then, more broadly, the relationship of medicine with government and Big Pharma. It also provides a valuable insight into current regulatory bodies and the ethical issues that face medical practice in Australia today. In addition, *Memoir of an accidental ethicist* provides a real education and an essential appreciation of the complexity of medical ethics.

The key message is that ethics is important, that it is fundamental to medical practice, and that more doctors should be aware of the issues that come under this broad umbrella — be it purposefully or by accident.

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Gin S Malhi

University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW.

gin.malhi@sydney.edu.au

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