Genetics for Health Professionals in Cancer Care From Principles to Practice

Edited by: Chris Jacobs, Patricia Webb and Lorraine Robinson. Published by: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-967284-4. Price: £39.99

This 344 page paperback book is based on the course run by King's College London and St. George's, University of London in partnership with the London regional genetics centres. It has contributions from 44 specialists in genetics and cancer care; all UK based. The book is aimed at health professionals who deal with cancer patients, and those with a family history of cancer. This book hopes to provide the non-geneticist professional with the knowledge of how to manage such patients. It demonstrates how to take and manage a cancer family history, drawing a cancer family tree; understanding cancer biology as well as the genes involved in breast, ovarian, prostate and other common malignancies. It assesses cancer risk and discusses how to communicate risk information as well as early detection and, measures available to reduce the risk of cancer and managing those with hereditary cancer.

This book provides practical advice and insight as a patient follows the pathway through genetic counselling and testing and examines the psychological, social and ethical problems encountered along the way. It also gives practical guidance on how to set up a cancer family history clinic.

I found this book to be well presented. It is divided into 9 sections; each section includes an introductory chapter, chapters on a particular cancer or area of expertise and a summary chapter which draws together the key learning points across the section, with suggestions for reading and exercises to consolidate learning. Throughout the text are boxes containing pertinent points, tables and black and white diagrams. A list of references is given for each chapter. I found this book informative and pleasurable to read; it did not assume any prior knowledge of genetics and the fundamentals were explained well. I found that the authors went into sufficient depth and detail to discuss each area and achieved the correct balance within a huge subject matter.

There were little in the way of omissions: how genetics impacts on cancer treatments could be explored. For example increased radio sensitivity noted with the cancer prone syndromes such as Ataxia Telangiectasia and how genetic variants may influence the response of normal tissues to chemotherapy and or radiotherapy.

Overall, I found this book to be very useful and reasonably priced at about £37.

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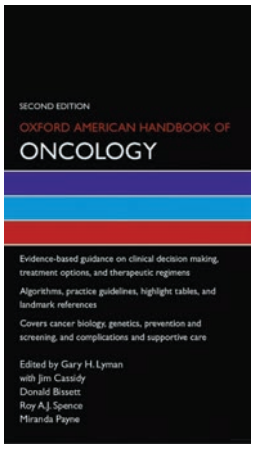
The Oxford American Handbook of Oncology – 2nd Edition

Edited by: Gary H Lyman with Jim Cassidy, Donald Bissett, Roy A Spence and Miranda Payne. Published by: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-992278-9. Price: £40.49



The American handbook is written for the benefit of medical students, trainees and specialists, by contributors from the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, the University of Washington, the Duke University and the Duke Cancer Institute, USA. The book is based on the Oxford Handbook of Oncology. Most of the contributors are Medical Oncologists and the book has a strong bias towards medical oncology.

It is hoped that it will provide a reliable source of knowledge for those practitioners who treat cancer patients. The handbook is of a small format and comprises 846 pages. The initial chapters cover the background to cancer; molecular biology, aetiology, epidemiology, cancer prevention and screening. There are several chapters covering "Principles of management" where individual chapters are devoted to specific modalities of treatments. This second edition includes new information on biologic therapies, therapeutic regimens and clinical trial information.

Part IV "Complications and supportive care" details presentation, pathogenesis, diagnosis and management of the complications of cancer and its treatment. The vast majority of the text of the book consists of bullet point lists which are quite easy to read. Tables and boxes are also used to display important points. Chapters also included the vital information on pain control, end of life care, management of oncological emergencies useful for day to day management of in-patients.

Part V "Specific Cancers" covers individual tumours; epidemiology, aetiology, presenting symptoms, pathology, investigations and management. The information was up to date, though I felt that the management was often skewed towards medical oncology. Although radiotherapy is a curable treatment modality for some tumour groups it was under represented in the book.

The opportunity to describe the full indications of it uses was not often presented, nor was the idea of a dose prescription. For instance a dose of 50Gy may be described there was no mention of the number of fractions and overall duration of treatment in many cases. The reader was not informed of the many potential uses of radiotherapy especially in the palliative setting, nor of its side effects and how to manage these side effects. Overall the information cited was evidence based, clearly displayed, and easy to understand.

In summary I felt that this book would be most valuable to medical students and trainees rather than to fully trained specialists.

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