

The Oxford Handbook of Ethics at the End of Life.

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This is a generally well written book that groups the chapters nicely into four sections. Section one focuses on clinical and legal issues, section two on the theoretical, cultural and psychosocial aspects while section three deals more specifically with physician-assisted death and section four the emergence of palliative care and the hospice movement. This book provides a varied and interesting compilation of chapters combining the ethical and historical legal landmarks that have shaped current policy and thinking on these issues. The chapters are neatly bounded allowing the reader to dip in and out according to their interests. The span of topics is generally comprehensive, covering ethics in end of life care right from pre-natal through to gerontology. The authors have a range of expertise in law, ethics, sociology, philosophy and healthcare and it would appeal to a readership with similar areas of interest.

While predominantly focused on the United States, which certainly shapes the legal case and policy examples, there are a few chapters that tap into debates in a more European context, notably Chapter 7, highlighting debates around continuous sedation and David Clark's synopsis of hospice and palliative care in Chapter 25. While all the chapters have merit and provide detailed overviews of their topic, I would point readers to Chapter 5 for a manageable and relatable discussion of potentially inappropriate treatments; Chapter 17 for a timely conversation on the effect of social media on end of life decision making; and Chapter 26 (despite citing Wikipedia as a reference!) for a thought provoking discussion of the impact of palliative care as a specialism.

Sections three and four feel a little scant given the volume of discussion, debate and publications on these topics, in particular there is no coverage of the debates around euthanasia, which would seem pertinent here. Yet perhaps it is because of such a wealth of existing literature that the editors felt it did not need to be included in this collection. However, it would be disappointing if readers newer to the field identified this as a comprehensive compilation of these debates. There are a few moments when the editors have been a little less than attentive. Primarily the Introduction that talks through six sections of the book despite there being four, does not address the chapters in the order in which they appear, and misspells an author's surname. There is also an ill thought-out subtitle in chapter two lumping together 'Actively hastening death and palliative care' despite there being no mention of palliative care in the section, which actually focuses on physician liability. However, despite these issues, what this book does illustrate well to the reader is the pace at which this field has, and continues to change, creating a climate in which law and ethics jostle to keep up with medical technology. It is a worthy addition to the field.