

Medico-Legal Responsibility in Singapore

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This book came to me after being returned by two potential reviewers. The subject is perhaps not a favourite with many people. Nevertheless, along with subjects like ethics and communication skills, a doctor's medico-legal responsibility is now widely recognised as something all undergraduates and doctors should have some knowledge of.

The difficulty about having a book on the subject of a doctor's legal responsibility is that the facts are peculiar to each country because each country has its own laws and unique legal history. The author, Yeo Khee Quan writes specifically for Singapore, but because Malaysia shares a similar British legal heritage with Singapore, some, or much, of what he writes would apply in Malaysia though the author does not indicate where it does and where it does not.

From his preface the author states his mission. Corporatisation of health care facilities, third party payers and new technologies, have stepped into cosy relationship a doctor and his patient once had decades ago. Medicine has become a business and the doctor in some ways reduced to a mere service provider. He wants to key the minds of doctors in to the realities of legal implications of the doctor-patient relationship today.

The book follows the basic format of any textbook of medical jurisprudence. Mention of Bolam's test

rings a distant bell of a little red textbook much like this from my undergraduate studies in Glasgow twenty years ago. On the other hand, the chapter on hospitals being jointly held responsible with the doctor's it allows to practice in it for malpractice, perhaps should have been familiar but was not quite like anything I remember. Occasional notes specific to Singapore appear, as the case of a general practitioner who failed to attend to a victim of a road accident in the vicinity of his clinic. Singapore has a law that requires every medical clinic to have resuscitation facilities for emergencies. This presumes that clinics are set up for treatment of emergencies and that doctor, who was not busy, and failed to respond to a call from the driver of the car who went to his clinic for help for his injured passenger was found guilty of misconduct.

The medico-legal issues involved in new technologies such as telemedicine and assisted reproduction and new financing schemes such as managed health care are also discussed, mainly academically as there are not many real-life court cases to test the issues. In the last but one chapter the author discusses the institutions and statutes that exist to oversee jurisprudence in Singapore. I felt this chapter should have appeared earlier. Despite not being an easy read, this book has its interesting points and is educational, but it is more than what I think, medical students would need.

154 Pages

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