BOOK REVIEWS


Reviewed by: David Latif, PhD
Bernard J. Dunn School of Pharmacy, Shenandoah University

As the pharmacy profession attempts to expand its role in health care through the provision of pharmaceutical care, practitioners will be increasingly called upon to make difficult ethical decisions concerning their patients. As such, it is imperative that students acquire the requisite foundation in ethics so that they do not find themselves "in over their heads" when confronted with an ethical dilemma. This book by Buerki and Vottero can go a long way toward acquiring this foundation.

Ethical Responsibility in Pharmacy Practice, 2nd Edition, is well written, and is an excellent resource for pharmacy courses that have an ethical component. It is a nice blend of theory and application. Approximately 45 cases are sprinkled throughout the book. The cases address such controversial ethical dilemmas as terminal sedation and euthanasia. Less controversial dilemmas include cases regarding informed consent and conflicts in drug selection. Particularly appealing, besides the many cases, are the commentaries after each case. These commentaries will not provide the student with a specific decision pertaining to the dilemma; however, they help to clarify the dilemma by commenting on the specifics of the case from an ethical standpoint (eg, "this action cannot be defended").

The organization of this book appears to be quite conducive to teaching pharmacy ethics. The authors firmly believe that professional values and ethical standards can be understood best within the historical parameters of American pharmacy practice. The first chapter reflects this belief. It provides the student with an overview of history of professional values in United States pharmacy practice from the end of the 19th century to the present.

The second chapter provides the student with a non-technical discussion of ethical theories and principles. The section titled, "A Framework for Ethical Decision Making in Pharmacy Practice," does an excellent job of applying the 4 major systems that form the foundation for ethical decision making to a step-by-step process toward ethical decision making. This process can be a tremendous aid for students when faced with ethical dilemmas as practitioners.

Chapter 3 uses APhA's 1994 Code of Ethics as a base to discuss the covenantal nature of the pharmacist-patient relationship. Ethical principles that affect this covenantal relationship are discussed in detail. These include the principles of beneficence, nonmaleficence, justice, and autonomy. Several cases with commentaries are added to emphasize the potential dilemmas regarding the pharmacist-patient relationship. These cases, along with the accompanying commentaries, should firm up students' understanding and grasp of relevant ethical principles and pharmacy practice.

The remaining 2 chapters discuss ethical considerations in professional communications and drug distribution. These chapters focus on realistic pharmacy cases and commentaries related to these topics. They allow students to practice critical thinking skills by using the previously discussed ethical decision making model to formulate opinions on resolving the dilemmas.

Annotated references and appendices feature pharmacy Codes of Ethics from 1848 to 1994, patients' Bills of Rights, and Codes of Ethics from other health professions. The student might find it interesting to compare the codes from different time periods. For example, regarding the provision of advice giving, the 1952 Code is significantly different than the 1994 Code.

Ethical Responsibility in Pharmacy Practice is an easy-to-read, relevant, and practical discussion of pharmacy ethics. It uses realistic cases and is an excellent resource for stand-alone ethics courses, as well as any course where ethical decision making is discussed.