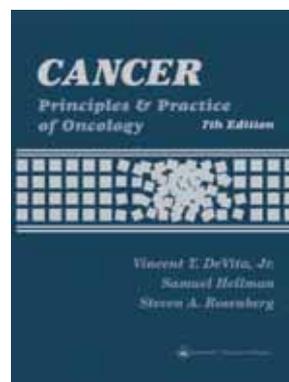


Oncology under the microscope

→ Raphaël Brenner

This latest edition of *Cancer: Principles and Practice of Oncology* is a one-stop shop for everything you ever wanted to know about oncology.



As with shopping, so with books. If you are the sort of person who prefers to shop in department stores rather than at your corner grocery, this completely revised, updated edition of *Cancer: Principles and Practice of Oncology* is your kind of textbook. Consisting of 65 chapters and around 3000 pages, with 355 contributing experts, the book covers every possible aspect of oncology and aims to help practitioners “keep abreast of the latest scientific advances in oncology as they apply to clinical practice, as well as to provide a critical and practical guide to the optimal management of cancer patients.”

The authors’ commitment to the molecular biology approach is manifest throughout the book, particularly in the sections devoted to treatments (including biotherapeutics).

The book is divided into four sections. Parts One and Four, titled respectively Molecular Biology of Cancer and Newer Approaches in Cancer Treatment (gene therapy, preventive vaccines, etc.) forcefully demonstrate that diagnosis and the development of new treatments are based on an understanding of specific molecular targets.

Part Two, Principles of Oncology, deals with the principles that underlie cancer prevention, diagnosis, and treatment and includes an excellent chapter on the design and analysis of clinical trials.

Part Three, which is by far the longest, offers practical information for state-of-the-art care for cancer patients. In addition to the chapters on cancer types, including liquid and childhood tumours, there are

Cancer: Principles & Practice of Oncology 7th edition

Edited by Vincent T. DeVita, Samuel Hellman and Steven A. Rosenberg
Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2005,
2898 pp, \$275

chapters on cancer prevention, oncological emergencies, supportive care and quality of life. Two features deserve to be highlighted: the very detailed and up-to-date descriptions of treatments and the multidisciplinary approach to oncology. The chapters dealing with major cancer organ sites are co-authored by surgeons, medical oncologists, and radiation therapists, in order to provide readers with “an integrated

multimodality approach to cancer care.”

But while much space is accorded to the multidisciplinary approach regarding somatic aspects, psychological issues are minimally addressed. In this book, the disease, not the patient, is at the core of the physician’s concern, which is a pity for a work that is considered a classic, and is indeed a highly comprehensive textbook on oncology. Since

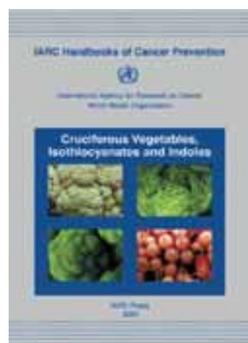
all the authors are North American, European readers may feel that the book reflects US points of view exclusively. This is especially true when it comes to certain therapeutic attitudes or in chapters devoted to specific US issues, such as the National Cancer Program or economic policies.

This said, the clarity of the texts and layout with its numerous illustrations and references are very helpful for oncologists and non-specialist physicians alike, aiming to deepen their knowledge on particular subjects. The book also comes with a CD-ROM containing the full text and illustrations plus a wonderful search engine.

Cruciferous Vegetables, Isothiocyanates and Indoles

IARC Handbooks of Cancer Prevention,
Vol 9 - IARC Press, 2005, 213 pp \$40

Cruciferous vegetables (cauliflower, cabbage, broccoli, wasabi, radish, etc.) account for between 5 and 25 % of vegetable consumption in Europe, and are important because they contain substantial amounts of glucosinolates (a group of compounds not found in other vegetables), which are hydrolysed to isothiocyanates and indoles. Experimental studies have shown that the latter compounds inhibit carcinogenesis through various mechanisms. However, as this book demonstrates in its thorough review of current knowledge related to the preventive effects of cruciferous vegetables on all types of cancers, the above results have only been partially corroborated by epidemiological studies. There is inadequate evidence to demonstrate that the consumption of cruciferous vegetables reduces the risk of cancer, except in the case of cancer of the stomach and lung, and even in these cancers the slight risk reduction is of the same magnitude as that for total vegetable intake. The authors thus conclude that cruciferous vegetables should not be promoted in preference to other vegetables in public education campaigns.



Internistische Onkologie

Edited by Wolfgang Wilmanns,
Dieter Huhn and Klaus Wilms
Georg Thieme, 2005, 848 pp
euro 229

With its clear, structured approach, the editors of the 2nd edition of this textbook of internal oncology manage to cover all the main principles of oncology (histopathology, epidemiology, molecular biology), and deal with therapeutics and the main types of cancer. It describes in detail the indications and side effects of new cytotoxic agents, and the main chemotherapeutic protocols currently used in solid tumours.

The book is packed with instructive tips for dealing with oncology. It is written concisely, but not in an oversimplified manner, and the layout is as clear as the text itself, with many useful illustrations (particularly helpful in the case of the TNM classification), diagrams and tables.

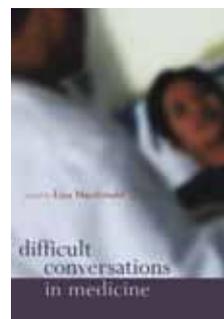
The book avoids presenting a boring catalogue of data, and instead reflects and illustrates the pluridisciplinary aspects of oncology. It also stresses the importance of evidence-based medicine.

The central importance of patients and their well-being are highlighted with an entire chapter devoted to supportive care, and to the psychosocial and ethical problems that arise in oncology.

Difficult Conversations in Medicine

Edited by Elisabeth Macdonald
Oxford University Press, 2005, 434 pp
£19.95

How do you tell a child that he or she has cancer? How should professional caregivers communicate with patients from different ethnic backgrounds? Although effective communication skills are essential in all aspects of clinical medicine, they are sorely lacking and all the more needed as a result of the development of technological medicine and the increased awareness and involvement of patients in their treatment. By depicting a wealth of cases and situations that confront physicians – dealing with cancer patients, with the elderly, or apologising to patients – this perceptive, original book offers much practical advice to physicians, including transcripts of conversations (with an angry cancer patient, with a patient who has a difference of opinion over treatment...), and proves that communication skills can be taught and learnt. As one of the authors writes, understanding the whole person and his or her concerns, and committing oneself to this relationship and this person is very demanding but also very rewarding. An insightful book, which will undoubtedly help health care professionals meet the needs of their patients.



Handbook of Cancer Chemotherapy

Edited by Roland T. Skeel
Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins, 2005
746 pp, \$44.95

The Cancer Chemotherapy Handbook

David S. Fischer, M. Tish Knobf, Henry
J. Durivage and Nancy J. Beaulieu
Mosby, 2005, 564 pp, £30.99

With the constant arrival of new drugs and biological agents on the market and the development of new combination regimens, the revised publication of these two classic handbooks is timely. Both books come in pocket size and follow the same model, listing first the chemotherapeutic agents and their use in alphabetical order, followed by the chemotherapies for adult human cancers according to type, and finally covering selected aspects of supportive care for cancer patients. The main difference is in the presentation of the therapeutic regimens.

Whereas Fischer & co. offer a brief introduction to each cancer type, followed by a compilation of the main common and less common chemotherapy protocols (in rough alphabetic order), quoting only the dosage, Skeel details, over 10–15

pages, the relevant clinical background data for each cancer type (epidemiology, diagnosis, staging...), before presenting, with many useful details, the various types of regimens for each condition. The latter book also provides a clear commentary on the rationale for choosing a particular therapeutic approach (prevention, surgery, radiotherapy).

These features make Skeel a particularly useful handbook for a wide range of readers – oncologists, medical students, as well as patients and their families who are looking for practical information about specific cancers and treatments. The compact, rather awesome layout is, however, a major drawback for the lay reader.

The Fischer handbook offers a more user-friendly, clearer presentation and an important chapter on the principles and applications of clinical trials (missing in Skeel), but it is obviously intended to serve a readership of oncology professionals.



Ces enfants qui vivent le cancer d'un parent

*(How children experience the cancer
of a parent)*

Marie-France Delaigue-Cosset
and Nicole Landry-Dattée
Vuibert, 2005, 140 pp, euro 16

“Health is incompatible with any form of denial,” wrote the distinguished child psychiatrist Donald Winnicott. In the same vein, this important book, written by a physician and psychologist from the Gustave-Roussy Institute, reminds us that it is important to tell children the truth. Through many moving testimonies and in-depth analyses, the authors show how the untruths, secrets, and “deafening silence” of parents who are cancer victims cause immense suffering to their children, and how unresolved mourning can scar children for the rest of their lives. Cancer often causes patients to withdraw into their shells, but “when we are open and trusting towards others and unafraid of sharing painful truths, fears, and doubts, it is a sign that the disease has not destroyed who we are.”

Disease, death and mourning, experienced in an atmosphere of truth and dialogue, do not harm children’s development but, we learn, strengthen them and help them face difficulties in later life. Since children sense things much more sharply than adults, it is clear that lying can do more harm than good. Through Gustave-Roussy’s support groups, many parents have been able to discover their children’s strength and courage. “You are very strong, stronger than us,” said one mother to her child. “I do not dare to say the truth, but from now on I will do so, because I know this is what you want.”

