

A-Z of Medical Law. By David McQuoid-Mason & Mahomed Dada. Juta (2011). xviii & pp 493. Price R375.00 (soft cover).

Medical Law is a fast-developing area of the law which has proved to be a popular and interesting elective course for LLB students at the undergraduate level, and field of research for law students at the postgraduate level. In the first place this is due to scientific innovations in medicine and surgery, which have led to many novel legal and ethical issues arising and which have to be dealt with in very real and serious situations. Examples include the issues surrounding stem cell research, pre-natal screening, sex selection and cloning, in vitro fertilisation, medicine and health care, and so forth. But the attractiveness of the field is also due to issues that have long been examples of the great debates of our time, such as issues surrounding the legalisation of euthanasia, the donating and selling of human organs, abortion, the distribution of scarce medical resources, and similar eternal polemics. The knowledge and capabilities of new technology, especially in the field of medicine, often develop faster than the guidelines and legal principles that are necessary for practitioners to practice ethically in this field. Physicians must be able to understand the medical, legal and ethical issues involved to be able to give advice to patients and their families, so that these citizens can make informed decisions about medical procedures that concern them.

The aim of this book is to be a quick reference guide for medical practitioners, related health care professionals, legal practitioners, medical students and law students in South Africa. The book covers an impressive amount of topics (656 in total, including cross-references) that range from abortion to the Code of Zulu Law provisions dealing with traditional healing. The authors have attempted to cover what they regard as the most relevant topics for members of the medical profession. It may happen that the reader of this book may look up a topic under a term that is known to the reader, but the topic may not be discussed under that term, as is the case with, for example, the terms 'in vitro fertilisation' or 'fertility'. In such a case one needs to think of another related term, or to scan through the table of contents to determine under what term the topic is discussed. (In the example I have given, the terms 'in vitro fertilisation' or 'fertility' are in fact discussed under the heading 'artificial insemination'.) In a work of this nature, it is understandable that there may be terms that are used in practice that may have been left out, but perhaps those terms could be included in the index to facilitate easy access to the discussion of the relevant concept.

Each topic starts off with a definition, which is followed by a discussion of the applicable law. What makes this book particularly user-friendly is the fact that after the discussion of the legal principles, the implications for doctors and other medical practitioners are highlighted, and cautionary advice is given. Each topic is concluded with references to other related laws. In addition, where appropriate, mention is made of the applicable international and local ethical codes. The authors make it clear that the book is not intended to turn doctors into 'do-it-yourself' lawyers, but rather to provide

them with an understanding of how the law might apply to them or the matter which is vexing them. Therefore, in appropriate situations doctors are advised when they should contact a lawyer or their professional indemnity insurer. The book also contains guidelines on how the Health Professions Council of South Africa deals with certain disciplinary matters.

Another aspect that makes this book user-friendly is the fact that the various topics are dealt with alphabetically in an A to Z format. This ensures that it should be easy to use as a reference guide in daily clinical practice for issues not only dealing with the law, but also those relating to finance, ethics, and employment aspects of medical practice. In other words the book covers topics that deal with both the professional and private life of the medical practitioner. The content of this book is easily accessible in the sense that the topics are not long intricate discussions through which the reader has to wade to get to the bottom of a problem, but in each case the legal position is summed up briefly but effectively, so that a reader not trained in law, but who is rather seeking a crisp and clear solution, may easily grasp the legal position. The legal language has also, wherever possible, been simplified so that it can be easily understood by doctors. The book also contains a very useful table of cases and a table of legislation that can be used for further research purposes, and an index which facilitates easy access to the text.

This book will without any doubt be useful to anyone practicing, studying or merely having an interest in the legal and ethical problems in the medical field. The *A-Z of Medical Law* is the only South African book of this nature; it is a gold mine of easily accessible information and will be an invaluable resource for practising medical and other healthcare professionals.

SANETTE NEL

*Professor, Department of Criminal and Procedural Law,
School of Law, University of South Africa*