found this book by Wesley Finegan, a Christian doctor and a cancer patient, immensely helpful. At the end of a busy clinical day I sat down with the book and reflected on the different situations I had encountered, what I had hoped to impart in information, support and advice and how the patients and their carers had responded. I then turned to the relevant chapters of this book to consider the questions the author suggests the patients ask and the actions he recommends to them. Time and again I found the chapters accurate, positive and empowering for the patient. It is a ‘self-help’ book of the best kind and very much in tune with the current thinking of helping patients and their families to help themselves.

This is not a book to sit down and read from cover to cover. It is too full of information for that. Far better to dip into the relevant chapter for you, should you or the one you are alongside be on the cancer journey in some way. After reading ‘What do I need to know about my pain?’ I would be well placed to describe my situation to the clinician in an informed and constructive way. I would have thought about the different aspects of my pain or pains and what aggravates them. I would know about a TENS machine and be able to ask whether this might help; I would be reminded to ask if I could keep on driving despite new medication.

Beautifully woven into the text is the author’s Christian faith and its meaning for him in his own experiences of cancer. This comes over very naturally without pushing the reader into a corner or preaching at a time of great vulnerability.

Beautifully woven into the text is the author’s Christian faith and its meaning for him in his own experiences of cancer.

I was then phoned by a close friend who had gone to hospital for a hernia repair and come home with a diagnosis of inoperable cancer. Before visiting I pondered on whether I could take a copy of the book to her? How would she receive it? My conclusion was that she would very much appreciate the book but not on my first visit. Perhaps I needed to feel comfortable listening to her hopes and fears at this time, rather than producing a book that includes a chapter ‘I’m going into the hospice’. In a few weeks, once chemotherapy is under way, I will definitely recommend it to her. Now there’s a good test! This must be a good book to recommend rather than to lend. The reader will want to return to it so often that they will need a copy of their own.

Thank you, Dr Finegan for this excellent text.

Gareth Tuckwell is Medical Director, Hospice in the Weald

If I were a layperson caring for a friend or relative with cancer I would want to have this book to help me.

Christian. While he makes specific mention of his own faith in one or two places, I sensed that in some intangible way his witness permeates every page of this book. Perhaps it is the quiet compassion and humility of one who has experienced suffering, and who has not been diminished by it. What is certain is that in some way this book is further testament to the grace of God who can work all things together for good to those who love him (Romans 8:28).
Richard Winter is a psychiatrist and theologian who says one of the reasons why people are unsatisfied with life is because society is preoccupied with airbrushed and computer enhanced features, perfect bodies, perfect homes, designer babies.

He says that people can be grouped into 1) non-perfectionists 2) healthy perfectionists and 3) dysfunctional perfectionists. Healthy perfectionists are realistic about their strengths and weaknesses. They are driven by a positive motivation to achieve. They pursue excellence. Unhealthy perfectionists are never good enough; their self-worth depends on performance; they are over-concerned with mistakes. Non-perfectionists are laid back and fun to be with but can be irritatingly lazy and unreliable. Some people are perfectionists in some areas of life only. Interpersonal perfectionists are frightened of their flaws; they fear rejection, because of what others may think of them. This can be associated with relationship problems, anxiety, burnout, eating disorders and depression. Perfectionists who have excessive standards for those around them have a tendency to be arrogant, impatient, blaming and distant. Because standards are not reached anger is generated and if directed inwards, depression can occur; if directed outwards rage with others may occur.

Winter encourages the reader to keep a journal and to use cognitive therapeutic techniques - identify habitual thoughts, learn to question them and begin to experiment with new and more reasonable thoughts:

‘November 12. I go to put the dishes in the dishwasher. My husband has put the dishes on the wrong rack…

Emotions: frustration and anger. 

Perfectionist thoughts: Why can’t he do it the right way? The bowls should go in the wider spaces. Why can’t he be systematic? Why is he so stubborn? Why doesn’t he respect my opinions?

Alternative thoughts: I believe my way is better, but there are other ways to load the dishwasher. A few crumbs won’t make much difference. I shouldn’t let a small thing ruin all the good in our relationship. He is not stubborn about most things.

Conclusions: This is a small matter. I don’t need to get so angry about it. Perhaps if I stop nagging him, he will be more likely to change. He listens to me and respects my opinion in most things…”

Winter writes as a Christian but states, ‘I am aware that my readers will not necessarily share my Christian worldview.’ He addresses the issue of perfectionism theologically: ‘Not only can you not make yourself perfect, but you also do not have to be perfect to be accepted by God.’ ‘True perfection is found in developing a Christ-like character.’ He quotes C.S. Lewis: ‘those who put themselves in His hands will become perfect, as He is perfect.’

This is a helpful book and unlikely to offend those who are not Christians. It is well written and referenced, useful for those who have a problem with perfectionism or are trying to help those who have.

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