

**Trust me - I'm a cancer patient**  
Wesley Finegan

- Radcliff Publishing 2004
- £14.95
- Pb 192 pp
- ISBN: 1 85775 877 3

I 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.

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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 I 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



**Being a cancer patient's carer - a guide**  
Wesley Finegan

- Radcliff Publishing 2005
- £14.95
- Pb 200 pp
- ISBN: 1 85775 638 X

**Winner of the 'First Edition Medical Books for the General Reader' category at 'The Society of Authors and The Royal Society of Medicine Books Award 2005'**

This book is written by a Christian doctor for the benefit of those who find themselves caring for someone who is suffering from cancer, and throughout its pages there is the stamp of authenticity from one who has been both a patient and a carer. Wesley Finegan combines his specialist knowledge of palliative care with his own experience of being a cancer patient, and more recently of being a family carer himself, to produce a practical guide that will prove invaluable to anyone taking on the daunting task.

The book deals with a range of physical and psychological problems, issues around communication, cancer treatments, dying and bereavement. It is split into short topically based chapters, and can be read cover-to-cover or dipped into as relevant issues arise. The style and format make it easy to read, and he makes every effort to get beyond the jargon to make the information accessible. It is packed with practical advice, and it provides answers to many of the questions that are often asked. It also encourages the carer to work together with the patient and health professionals to achieve realistic and mutually agreed outcomes.

While this book is primarily for carers, I believe any professional who may be involved in the care of a patient with cancer would do well to read it. I was struck by the

depth of insight into the carer's perspective that it conveys, and I think I have come away with a better understanding that will inform my own practice. If I were a lay person caring for a friend or relative with cancer I would want to have this book to help me. Yet many carers may never know that such a book exists - unless we have read it and are prepared to point them in the direction of the help and advice that is available.

Wesley Finegan writes from the perspective of one who has specialist knowledge but who has also experienced the 'subject' first-hand. He also writes as a

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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).

**Jeffrey Stephenson** is a Consultant in Palliative Medicine in Plymouth



## Perfecting ourselves to death

*The pursuit of excellence and the perils of perfectionism*  
Richard Winter

- IVP 2005
- US\$16.00
- 205 pages pb
- ISBN: 0-8308-3259-9

**R**ichard Winter is a psychiatrist and theologian who says one of the reasons why people are unsatisfied with life is because society is preoccupied with air-brushed 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?

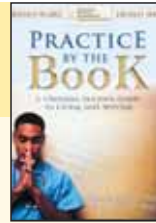
*Alternative thoughts:* I believe my way is better, but there are other ways to load the dishwasher. A few crumbs won't make much difference. I shouldn't let a small thing ruin all the good in our relationship. He is not stubborn about most things.

*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.

**Dominic Beer** is a Consultant Psychiatrist in London



## Practice by the book

*A Christian doctor's guide to living and serving*  
Gene Rudd and Al Weir

- CMDA (Christian Medical and Dental Association) 2005
- US\$16.99
- Pb 260 pp
- ISBN: 0 970 66314 5

**D**oes being a Christian make a difference to our medical practice? Probably most of us would like to answer 'yes', but if we take an honest look at ourselves and the other doctors around us, we may have some doubts. We may feel caught up in something bigger than ourselves, where we have little room for manoeuvre.

Gene Rudd and Al Weir, two doctors from CMDA (our sister organisation in the USA) have learned from experience that being a Christian can radically affect the way we practise medicine, but it is not an automatic process. 'When Christ changed our lives to make us Christians, he also changed the kind of doctors that we should become. We as Christian doctors must learn to weave together our science and the Spirit of God.'

It will take careful thought and deliberate effort, if our practice of medicine is going to count for Christ; but the benefits are great and we neglect them at our peril. If we feel that the pressures of professional life are robbing us of the abundant life that Jesus promised (John 10:10), and we would like the whole of our lives to count more for Jesus, this book can help us.

The writers take us through such topics as the foundations of our daily relationship with Christ and what influences our lifestyle and career choices. We are invited to consider how Jesus' bias to the poor and needy affects our priorities, how competence and Christ-

like character need to be developed, how we tackle ethical issues, how we can best use our resources of time and money, how we cope with pain in our own lives, how we protect and enhance our relationships in marriage and with colleagues, and how God can use our personal testimony.

Each chapter is freely illustrated with personal stories and contains biblical guidelines and practical suggestions. Many of the stories come with refreshing honesty and humility, and lessons learned

This book is relevant and readily applicable to any doctor who wants to rediscover joy in Christ and be more effective in professional life

from failure are readily admitted. Although written from the US context and sometimes in a rather American style, the material of the book is relevant and readily applicable to any doctor and will help all of us who want to rediscover our joy in Christ and be more effective for him in our professional lives.

**Kevin Vaughan** is CMF Associate General Secretary