
We are witnessing the dawn of the era of cancer genetics. Since the genetic mechanisms of cancer are still predominantly unknown, discoveries frequently have the potential to change our knowledge base and clinical capabilities. As researchers rapidly unearth new discoveries, methods of informing others must be found. Familial Cancer Management serves as a good introduction to the main principles of cancer genetics and helps to place us on solid ground. In keeping with the multidisciplinary roots of cancer genetics, the book calls on the experts in medical genetics, primary care, oncology, surgery, nursing, and epidemiology.

Familial Cancer Management can be useful to all health practitioners and researchers working with issues of hereditary cancer. It makes a strong effort to impress upon primary care providers the value of obtaining family history information from patients and referring appropriate families for further work-up. The need for such education is understood when the book acknowledges that "Family cancer history is still often the most neglected portion of the patient's medical evaluation." While Familial Cancer Management identifies such deficiencies in the current state of patient care, it also educates the reader how this situation can be remedied.

Genetic counselors will likely benefit from many of the chapters. The sections on pedigree analysis teach the reader how to make a diagnosis of familial cancer, discussing skills for recognizing Li-Fraumeni Syndrome, multiple endocrine neoplasias, and aggregations of gastrointestinal cancers. Even the experienced cancer genetic counselor would find the chapter on environmental factors quite useful; it contains the type of information helpful for explaining to a patient why many of his or her family members have cancer when the cause is not hereditary. Regrettably, however, this fascinating chapter covers only a few types of cancer. Genetic counselors, who are usually self-taught in the areas of surgery and oncology, can be introduced to relevant topics in those specialties in the chapters on cancer screening, surgical management, and chemoprevention. Other health practitioners, such as oncologists and primary care providers, who may be less
well-versed in genetics, would likely benefit from the chapters dedicated to laboratory techniques of hereditary cancer diagnosis and genetic counseling issues.

Genetic counselors will be pleased with the book's extensive discussion of ethical and legal implications of cancer genetics. The chapter on "Genetic Counseling" reviews the basic tenets of genetic counseling and discusses the many issues that may be raised in counseling individuals considering genetic testing. The discussion touches on several controversial topics. One of these controversies is the most basic and important: "Who needs genetic counseling for cancer?" The author of this chapter answers this question affirmatively, stating that genetic counseling should be offered to all persons with an increased risk for cancer, regardless of whether counseling is requested by the patient or a health care provider. Another controversial issue focuses on a question that will become increasingly important with the advance of technology: "Should genetic testing for cancer predisposition be provided by genetic counselors?" The discussion asserts that genetic counseling is necessary because primary care providers are not yet sufficiently prepared to counsel patients undergoing genetic testing for cancer. A chapter entitled "Ethical Issues" brings up interesting yet commonly known viewpoints on topics such as prophylactic mastectomy and confidentiality within a family. The chapter on "Legal Issues" provides a superb review of the history of genetic discrimination and discusses potential legal questions in the future of cancer genetics.

Within each of the chapters in the book, the discussion of various topics is informative and useful. However, because the chapters have been written by authors of different disciplines, some problems of continuity arise for the reader. The first of these problems is that some degree of contradiction exists between the chapters. For example, the chapter that discusses laboratory techniques for genetic diagnosis of cancer states that, "All persons at risk of having inherited the predisposition should be encouraged to provide a blood sample." This statement suggests that our enthusiasm over the capabilities of genetic testing may prevail over patient autonomy. It could be misinterpreted to devalue the tenant of nondirectiveness or the process of informed consent. The chapter on genetic counseling, however, indicates that "Voluntariness should be the cornerstone of any presymptomatic testing program for cancer." Since the field of cancer genetics is new, some controversy in a multidisciplinary book is to be expected.

The second problem that arises from having multiple authors is that the organization of the book is not as convenient as would be desired. For example, breast cancer is discussed in several places throughout the book, in chapters on diagnosis of familial cancer, molecular biology, surgical management, chemoprevention, surgery, and ethical issues. Instead of scattering...