# Contents

List of cases page vii  
List of papers viii  
Preface to the second edition xi  
Preface to the first edition xiii  
Cases in medical ethics and law: an interactive tutorial xvii

1 Death and dying: decisions at the end of life 1  
Section 1 Values and goals at the end of life 1  
Section 2 Deciding not to attempt resuscitation 6  
Section 3 Refusal of treatment, and advance directives 11  
Section 4 Withdrawing treatment from incompetent patients 14  
Section 5 Relief of symptoms at the end of life 18  
Section 6 Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide 21  
Section 7 The values and goals of medicine revisited 28

2 Reproduction: decisions at the start of life 33  
Section 1 New reproductive technologies: benefit or burden? 33  
Section 2 The rights of the parents and the welfare of the child: the example of freezing reproductive tissue 36  
Section 3 Preimplantation diagnosis and selective termination: the example of ‘reproductive tourism’ 41  
Section 4 Fetal reduction and abortion 42  
Section 5 Compliance in pregnancy 46  
Section 6 A case study of high-risk pregnancy 51

3 Genetics: information, access and ownership 57  
Section 1 Living with uncertainty 58  
Section 2 Living with certainty 62

4 Medical research: participation and protection 77  
Section 1 The research subject’s perspective: a case study 78  
Section 2 Valid consent, mental capacity and best interests 81  
Section 3 Researchers’ responsibilities and developing countries 91  
Appendix The Nuremberg Code 96

5 Mental health: consent, competence and caring 101  
Section 1 Autonomy, competence and mental health 101  
Section 2 Liberty, consent and compulsion 108  
Section 3 Children and young people: presumed incompetent? 115  
Section 4 Caring in the therapeutic relationship 118

6 Long-term care: autonomy, ageing and dependence 125  
Section 1 Truth-telling 125  
Section 2 Autonomy, competence and confidentiality 130  
Section 3 Ethics in relationships 138  
Section 4 The meaning and ethical significance of old age 143
Contents

7  Children and young people: conflicting responsibilities  149  
   Section 1  The child in the family  149  
   Section 2  Consent to treatment and the child’s best interests  152  
   Section 3  Confidentiality and conflicting responsibilities  159  
   Section 4  The child in society  161  
   Section 5  Making ‘the child’s voice’ meaningful  165  

8  Resource allocation: justice, markets and rationing  171  
   Section 1  The problem of resource allocation  171  
   Section 2  Deciding by medical criteria  174  
   Section 3  Using social and political criteria to decide on resource allocation  178  
   Section 4  Global justice, markets and healthcare rationing  183  
   Section 5  Philosophical models of resource allocation  184  

9  Thinking about ethics: autonomy and patient choice  191  
   Section 1  The importance of autonomy in medical ethics  191  
   Section 2  What is autonomy?  197  
   Section 3  Autonomy: alternative models in European law  198  
   Section 4  Autonomy: alternative models in new theories  202  

Appendix 1: Study guide for teachers  215  
Appendix 2: Using keywords to explore this book  221  
Bibliography  225  
Index  245
Cases

1  Death and dying: decisions at the end of life  1
   The case of Anna  1
   The case of Mr R  6
   The case of Mr C  11
   The case of Leslie Burke  13
   The case of Terri Schiavo  14
   The case of Jeanette  18
   The case of Diane Pretty  22
   The case of Dr Chabot  25
   The case of Ron Berghmans  28

2  Reproduction: decisions at the start of life  33
   The case of Natalie Evans  37
   The case of freezing reproductive tissue  37
   The case of Karin and Peter  41
   A case of high-risk pregnancy  52

3  Genetics: information, access and ownership  57
   A case of breast cancer genetics  58
   A case of the right not to know  62
   The case of Alison  63
   The case of Debbie and Daniel Greenberg  67

4  Medical research: participation and protection  77
   The case of Jan  78
   A case of genetic research  81
   The case of HIV drug trials in developing countries  91

5  Mental health: consent, competence and caring  101
   The case of Mr AB  101
   The case of Mr C  105
   The Bournewood case  112
   The case of ‘W’  115
   The case of Miss A  119
   The case of Mr T  120

6  Long-term care: autonomy, ageing and dependence  125
   The case of Mr D  125
   The case of the forgetful mourner  127
   The case of Mrs B  130
   The case of Mr A  131
   The case of Lisa and Martin  138
   The case of Emmi  143

7  Children and young people: conflicting responsibilities  149
   The case of Sean  149
   The case of Emilia  153
   The case of JW  154
   The case of Pekka  157
   The Montjoie affair  159
   The case of Sue Axon  160
   The cases of C and F  161
   The case of Danny  168

8  Resource allocation: justice, markets and rationing  171
   The case of Mr K  171
   The case of ‘Baby Ryan’  175
   The case of ‘Child B’  176

9  Thinking about ethics: autonomy and patient choice  191
   The case of Peter Noll  192
   The case of Carl  197
   The case of Olle  213

Appendix 1: Study guide for teachers  215
The case of Mr P  215
## Papers

All papers are reproduced with permission.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Death and dying: decisions at the end of life</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Calculating the value of life?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Richard Huxtable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physician-assisted death, violation of the moral integrity of medicine and the slippery slope</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ron Berghmans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physician-assisted suicide in the case of mental suffering</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ron Berghmans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Illness, pain, suffering and the value of life</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ron Berghmans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reproduction: decisions at the start of life</th>
<th>33</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>New reproductive technologies and practices: benefits or liabilities for children?</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christine Overall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there a right not to be a parent?</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anna Smajdor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The fewer the better? Ethical issues in multiple gestation</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mary B. Mahowald</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Judgements of non-compliance in pregnancy</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Françoise Baylis and Susan Sherwin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problems of paternalism and autonomy in a 'high-risk' pregnancy</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gillian M. Lockwood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Genetics: information, access and ownership</th>
<th>57</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I am definitely having it done</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>June Zatz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can children and young people consent to be tested for adult-onset genetic disorders?</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Donna Dickenson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Medical research: participation and protection</th>
<th>77</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The principles of medical research</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>K. W. M. Fulford</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Autonomy and informed consent in the ethics of the randomized controlled trial: philosophical perspectives</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Richard Ashcroft</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethical and legal issues concerning the involvement of vulnerable groups in medical research</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Salla Löijonen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mental health: consent, competence and caring</th>
<th>101</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Protection of the rights of the mentally ill in the Netherlands</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ron Berghmans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Free to self-injure?</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kerry Gutridge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drug treatment in child psychiatry</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carlo Calzone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A different voice in psychiatric ethics</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gwen Adshead</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Authors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Long-term care: autonomy, ageing and dependence</td>
<td>Guy Widdershoven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Truth and truth-telling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commentary on the case of Mr A</td>
<td>Tony Hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Care for dependent elderly persons and respect for autonomy</td>
<td>Ruud ter Meulen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Autonomy, feminism and personhood</td>
<td>Gwen Adshead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commentary on the case of Lisa and Martin</td>
<td>Tony Hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commentary on the case of Emmi</td>
<td>Chris Gastmans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Children and young people: conflicting responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethical issues in child psychiatry and child psychotherapy: conflicts between the child,</td>
<td>John Pearce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>parents and practitioners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moral issues concerning children’s legal status in Finland in relation to psychiatric</td>
<td>Veikko Launis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>treatment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Resource allocation: justice, markets and rationing</td>
<td>Berkeley Greenwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bang for the buck: what purchasers and commissioners think and do</td>
<td>Masja van den Burg and Ruud ter Meulen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Thinking about ethics: autonomy and patient choice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The right to refuse treatment</td>
<td>Christian Hick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Varied and principled understandings of autonomy in English law: justifiable inconsistency</td>
<td>John Coggon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>or blinkered moralism?</td>
<td>Out of the doll’s house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A deliberative approach to bioethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Michael Parker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix 1: Study guide for teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching clinical medical ethics</td>
<td>Dieter Birnbacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface to the second edition

Why call this book a ‘workbook’? Isn’t it more than that? In length and coverage alone, this is a full-fledged textbook, not what might seem a mere auxiliary teaching item. We are all experienced teachers of medical ethics and law, and this book embodies the pedagogic methods and strategies in which we believe. And while we are committed above all else to helping readers make up their own minds, we also have our own positions on the issues we raise, along with our own ‘take’ on the theoretical underpinnings of medical ethics. It is fair to say that we are much less utilitarian in our approach than the dominant trend in British bioethics, for example. So aren’t we selling ourselves and the book short by trivializing it with the title of ‘workbook’?

What might seem a pedantic issue of nomenclature has preoccupied the authors since we began planning for a second edition of the Cambridge Medical Ethics Workbook as long ago as 2004. At least one reviewer of the first edition made the point we set out above, which provoked us into some very prolix table discussions about our overall purpose, going well beyond the title issue. In the end we chose to retain the original name, on the principle that the book has enjoyed a very favourable reception under that title; but here at the start of the second edition, we want to point out that our ambitions and the book’s ‘mission’ are considerably broader than the title ‘workbook’ may imply to some readers.

We have tried to provide an innovative method of learning and teaching medical ethics and law from the ‘bottom-up’, beginning with actual cases and challenging readers to develop their own analysis and recommendations. Medical and nursing educators have praised the first edition because it felt ‘real’, but as with ‘realistic’ fiction, it takes some doing to create that effect. We are aware that we have not always succeeded, but we strongly feel that the attempt is worth making. For many years the dominant trend in medical ethics education was ‘principlist’ or ‘top-down’, with a number of overarching deductive principles introduced to the reader and then applied to particular cases. Our approach is ‘bottom-up’, presenting cases – taken in many instances from real-life clinical examples, with adjustments for confidentiality – and working with the reader to derive from them maxims or principles that can apply more generally. For the philosophically minded, our approach is more inductive and empirical: less like the Cartesian method than like Aristotle’s method of phronesis or case elucidation. Two of us are in fact philosophers by training, one a lawyer, although we have all taught for many years in medical schools and collaborated with clinicians as research partners. All three of us view our book as no less theoretically weighty than the more dominant strand of principlism, but as an alternative – one which, in the Quaker phrase, ‘speaks to the condition’ of healthcare professionals.

We do present the major ethical schools of deontology, utilitarianism, feminism, communitarianism and virtue ethics – particularly in the final chapter, where we examine the philosophical and legal basis of the key concept of autonomy, along with challenges to the previous dominance of this concept in Anglo-American bioethics. Here the theoretical depth of the book – its claim to be more than just a ‘workbook’ – is most apparent, as we elucidate the importance of autonomy in medical ethics but also present alternatives to its dominance from European law and other conceptual models. Michael Parker’s article in that chapter, ‘A deliberative approach to bioethics’, can be read as an example of the way in which the workbook as a whole moves carefully from practical matters to critical analysis of key ethical concepts such as rights and community.

While it was widely praised for being consciously practice-oriented, distinguishing itself from the top-down principlist approach, the previous workbook did embody a theoretical perspective based on respect for everyday ethics, experience, relationships and narratives. We have tried to avoid the use of the clever
hypothesised cases beloved of moral philosophers, in
favour of common situations that may not even appear
at first glance to raise moral issues. Why our ‘moral
antennae’ pick up certain situations as ethical dilem-
as and ignore others is itself a question worthy of
ethical analysis.

At the same time, ‘workbook’ still seems an appro-
priate title: we are committed to challenging readers
to ‘work through’ their own initial responses and
thoughts on the profound questions this book raises.
The addition of an entirely new component, the
CD-ROM of six case studies, demonstrates that pro-
cess. After watching an initial clip setting out an ethical
dilemma from the areas of genetics, reproductive med-
cine or research, readers are asked what they would
have done in the situation. They are then directed
down one of two or more branching paths, given
further information and asked whether it would
make them change their minds, and finally presented
with the likely outcome of their decision. At the end
they are asked to reconsider or justify their original
choice in the light of the further information and
consequences. So we also stand by our statement in
the introduction to the first edition that ‘this is very
much a workbook’, and we have devised new ways of
working for and with the reader in this second edition.

Acknowledgements

The former BBC producer Alison Tucker, who scrip-
ted and directed the video sections for the CD-ROM,
lived to see the CD-ROM produced as a separate entity
but died before it came out as an integrated compo-
nent of this workbook. She was the most professional
colleague and most imaginative collaborator any
author could wish for. Professor Heather Widdows
and Dr David Lloyd developed the structure of the
CD-ROM, the extensive glossary and the teaching
strategy associated with it, working along with
Donna Dickenson. We owe deep gratitude to all of
them.

Nick Dunton, Nisha Doshi and Jane Seakins of
Cambridge University Press have seen this project
through a number of difficult stages, with calm and
encouragement. We hope they are as pleased as we are
that it has come to fruition.

Ron Berghmans of the University of Maastricht
deserves special thanks not only for expanding his orig-
inal contributions to Chapter 1 on death and dying, but
also for volunteering a personal account of his own
serious illness. Our thanks to him for his courage.
Other contributors are listed under individual chapter
headings. The use of their articles, many written espe-
cially for this edition, has allowed us to create a book
with many different ‘voices’, many more sonorous than
our own, all in what we hope is close harmony.

Richard Huxtable would like also to thank
Genevieve Liveley for her encouragement, plus his
colleagues and students for their support for – and
input (both explicit and implicit) into – the book,
which he dedicates to his Nan, Alma Huxtable.

Donna Dickenson would like to dedicate this book
to Elsie Vernon Hart, who is herself a case study in
courage, endurance and laughter.
Preface to the first edition

The Cambridge Medical Ethics Workbook is a practical, case-based introduction to medical ethics for anyone who is interested in finding out more about and reflecting on the ethical issues raised by modern medicine. It is designed to be flexible; suitable both to be read in its own right and also for use as a set text in group teaching or in open learning. It is aimed at the interested general reader, at practising healthcare professionals and at medical and nursing students studying ethics for the first time.

The workbook is able to be flexible in this way because it is based around the reading of and reflection upon real cases. It uses a variety of structured activities to introduce and to explore the major ethical issues facing medicine today. These activities are clustered around: (a) cases (which were provided by healthcare professionals from many countries); (b) commentaries on those cases by healthcare professionals, ethicists, lawyers and so on; and (c) short papers by experts in the area concerned. This is very much a workbook, designed to help readers think about, reflect upon and to work their own way through ethical problems, by deliberating on the issues raised by them either alone or together with others. In this way, the reader is guided through the core themes in medical ethics in a way which is appropriate for them and which is relevant to their own experience.

While a glance at the workbook’s contents page shows that it covers most of the major themes in medical ethics, it does not aim to provide in itself a comprehensive survey of every issue. Our aim is rather, through the active and structured exploration of core themes and key cases, to develop skills of independent study and research in ethics. This is an increasingly important requirement of healthcare professionals. For a measure of good practice in medicine today is increasingly coming to be seen to be the extent to which such practice is ‘evidence-based’. An understanding of the ethical issues involved and of the way to balance and assess the validity of ethical arguments in relation to particular cases is a core skill in the development of an analytical approach to medicine. Good quality healthcare is ethical healthcare and a consideration of the ethical dimensions of decision-making in healthcare practice must form a cornerstone of good evidence-based practice. This workbook helps practitioners and students to develop these skills and to have confidence in their use, not only in the context of research but also of teamwork within clinical practice.

Medical ethics is increasingly coming to be seen as an essential element of the education of any healthcare professional (GMC, 1993) and this is increasingly reflected in the medical and nursing schools themselves. Recently teachers of medical ethics in UK medical schools published a joint statement on the core themes and topics which ought to form the basis of any ethics curriculum (Consensus statement by teachers of medical ethics and law in UK medical schools, 1998). Similar work is also currently being done by the Association of Teachers of Ethics in Australasian Medical Schools and developments are also proceeding apace in other countries. Whilst recognizing these developments and being to some extent a reflection of them, this workbook does not follow any of these curricula rigidly. (We do however provide a useful grid in appendix two, showing how the UK national core curriculum maps onto the chapters and subtopics of this workbook.) This workbook is intended to be a flexible educational resource which will enable those who teach medical ethics in any of these or any other educational setting to explore the core themes and issues in the ethics of medicine using cases and activities which will resonate with and be engaging for both medical and nursing students and those healthcare professionals who wish to develop their skills in this area. We would encourage teachers of medical ethics to pick and choose cases, activities and themes from the workbook in order to construct courses, workshops or training days appropriate to those they are
Preface to the first edition

The workbook is intended to be both a coherent approach to medical ethics and also a toolkit of resources for teachers and lecturers.

The workbook is divided into three parts. In part one we explore some key ethical themes arising as a result of recent and ongoing technological developments in medicine. The first chapter is on ethical decisions at the end of life and explores ethical issues relating to the withholding and withdrawing of life-prolonging treatment and other ethical issues at the end of life. The chapter’s focus is the extent to which the application of modern medicine at the end of life demands a reconsideration of the goals of medicine itself. When healing is no longer possible what ought to be the goals of medicine and of the healthcare professional? The second chapter in part one looks at the ethical issues raised by genetic testing and by the use of genetic information in clinical practice. The third chapter investigates the ethical implications of developments in reproductive technology. The fourth looks at the ethics of medical research itself and investigates the extent to which the research which is driving advances in medicine itself raises ethical issues – for those who organize and fund such research, for those clinicians who enrol their patients in research and for those of us who participate as research subjects.

In part two of the workbook we look more specifically at four themes which permeate medical ethics: vulnerability, truth-telling, competence and confidentiality. We do so by looking at the ethical issues raised by medicine and healthcare with three particularly vulnerable groups of patients. In keeping with the UK national curriculum in medical ethics, we also consider the vulnerabilities of clinicians. In chapter five we investigate the ethical issues that arise in long term and daily care. In chapter six we look at the ethics of mental health and of the treatment of psychiatric patients. And in chapter seven our attention turns to the ethics of work with children and young people. In each case the key issues are competence, vulnerability, truth-telling and confidentiality.

In part three of the workbook we explore some of the generic ethical issues relating to healthcare. In chapter eight, still by means of real cases, we investigate the ethical issues relating to the allocation of healthcare resources, questions of priority setting and just distribution. It hardly needs saying that these issues are increasingly important in all healthcare systems and across all clinical specialties. Finally, in chapter nine we reflect on a theme which emerges at several points throughout the workbook, the extent to which we ought to see autonomy and patient choice as the key measure of whether healthcare provision and treatment are ethical. What exactly are the limits of such patient-centredness? To what extent is an ethical approach based on the concerns of individual patients capable of addressing the role of relationships and the duty of care which appear to be central to ethical healthcare practice?

The existence of the workbook depends a great deal upon the willingness and enthusiasm of those who have provided us with cases, papers and commentaries and so on. We feel that this makes the workbook both up to date and vibrant as a way of learning about medical ethics. But times change and so do the ethical issues in medicine. It is our intention to update the workbook in the future and in order to do that we will need new cases and papers. If you have any comments on the workbook or any suggestions for how it might be improved, or if you have cases which would work well as educational tools we would be very pleased to hear from you. You can contact us on michael.parker@ethox.ox.ac.uk.

We think the case-based approach, supported by activities and guided reading exercises has several advantages over other approaches to medical ethics. Firstly, such an approach cuts across disciplinary and cultural boundaries. Everyone can ‘relate’ in some sense to an actual case, even if they come from very distinct religious or cultural traditions which dictate different principles of ethical conduct. The cases we have chosen are wherever possible ‘everyday’ cases. Similarly, different healthcare disciplines have increasingly evolved their own forms of healthcare ethics: nursing ethics, for example, sees its concerns and approach as quite distinct from those of medical ethics proper. But in a case-based approach, the different slants of different disciplines can be explicitly built in. Secondly, such an approach requires little previous knowledge of ethics and reassures students who think of philosophy as abstruse and difficult. It is at the same time an approach which is capable of facilitating the development of the skills necessary for a rigorous and consistent analytical approach to the ethics of healthcare practice. Thirdly, a guided, case-based approach encourages students to think of comparable cases of their own, and thus to generalize what they have learned from one case to another, comparing similarities and differences. Finally, given the approach
adopted by this workbook, the case-based approach allows students to learn from practice in other countries.

We hope that you will agree and that these chapters will give you the necessary motivation and support for doing the important tasks of learning about medical ethics, for students/practitioners, and of teaching students and practitioners, for medical and nurse educators.

Acknowledgements

We owe thanks to a great many people for their help and advice with this workbook over the three years it has taken us to write it. The cases and papers used have been gathered from all over the European Union, the United States and Australia. Many of them were collected at a series of workshops held as part of the European Biomedical Ethics Practitioners Education project (EBEPE) which was funded by the European Commission’s BIOMED II programme. We would like to acknowledge the European Commission’s Directorate General 12 for their support during this period and Hugh Whittal in particular for his support and encouragement. We would also like to acknowledge the role of Imperial College London who supported us through the later stages of the EC project.

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Preface to the first edition
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Michael Parker
Donna Dickenson

Notes

1. In the second edition, we have replaced this with an appendix mapping a common system of keywords against the contents of this book. Readers interested in the UK core curriculum can, however, find a reference for the most recent version in the bibliography (Stirrat et al., on p. 241).
2. The second edition is not similarly divided.
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   use the Browse button on the Run dialog box to navigate to the file ‘setup’.

4. Click the ‘OK’ box on the Run dialog box.

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