Bonnie S. LeRoy, Patricia McCarthy Veach, Dianne M. Bartels (eds): Genetic counselling practice: advanced concepts and skills

Heather Skirton

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This book has been authored and edited by a group of experienced genetic counsellors, many of whom are also involved in educating health professionals in the field. All contributors are from the United States and so unsurprisingly, the approach has a definite North American flavour. However, there is much to be learnt from the individual chapters in terms of genetic counselling skills. The title is relatively expensive for a soft cover book of this type and may therefore be more suitable for purchase by departmental or educational libraries than by individual practitioners.

The book is divided into three sections, the first being focussed on the dynamics of the genetic counselling process. Facilitating decision making and communication of risk are addressed, as well as other chapters on grief, anger, resistance and transference issues. Particularly in this first section, the book takes on the characteristics of a training manual, with helpful exercises at the end of each chapter that could be used in an educational context or by individuals aiming to improve their own practice. A series of suggested role plays are also included to support development of key skills.

The second section of the book is devoted to specific issues around cultural competence and working with families, children, adolescents and individuals with learning disabilities. While the initial chapters appear to be aimed at students or novices, the later chapters go into greater theoretical depth and would be more suitable for experienced practitioners. The chapter on working with families includes

a very useful summary of family systems theory and its application to genetic counselling.

In the final section of the book, the focus switches from the client to the genetic counsellor, with chapters on caring for oneself as a practitioner and professional development. The material on reflective practice is excellent and complements the earlier chapter on countertransference.

Although I would recommend this book as a useful text, I would add two caveats. While many of the case examples of client/counsellor interaction are helpful, they are firmly situated in US culture and the wording and approach to the client would not always be appropriate for the practice of genetic counsellors in other countries. In addition, the text appears to encourage genetic counsellors to make judgements about a person's emotional and mental state, and act upon those judgements, without necessarily having an appropriate level of psychological or psychotherapeutic training. An example is given in the book where the genetic counsellor assesses a woman as having a complicated grief reaction because she is still carrying her child's clothing in her bag 6 weeks after the death of that child. This action may or may not indicate a complicated grief reaction, but this approach belies the complexity of coping strategies in response to grief and the unique nature of individual reactions.

Finally, the experience of the authors is evident in the writing and the book is underpinned by a wide range of current references. This is a comprehensive publication that will be of interest to genetic counsellors working in a range of settings.

H. Skirton (✉)
Faculty of Health, University of Plymouth, Plymouth, UK
e-mail: heather.skirton@plymouth.ac.uk