

## Book Review

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### Tough Choices: Stories from the front line of medical ethics

#### At a glance

Content: Informative

Ease of use: Easy to navigate/read

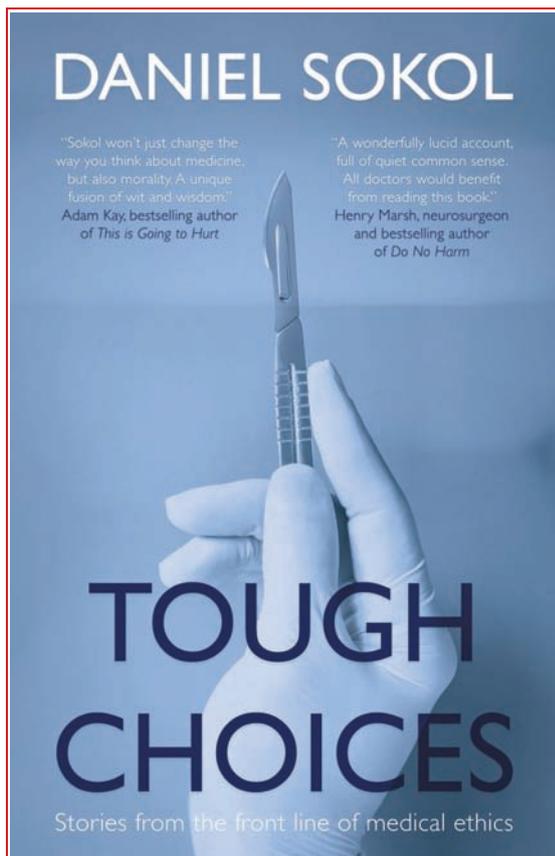
Value: Good value for money

- **Daniel Sokol**

The Book Guild Ltd, 2018

ISBN: 978-1912575480

PB, 304 pages, £8.19



Tough Choices is a book comprising of Daniel Sokol's own personnel stories and factual experiences of the doctor–patient relationship and the ethical dilemmas he often faced in clinical practice. As healthcare professionals, we all must adhere to certain ethical standards (as we do in life) and the code of conduct we

are all bound to as registered professionals. In this book, Sokol reflects upon the day to day and night to night issues often faced as a doctor inflamed by his own interprofessional conflict.

Medical law and ethics can be both challenging and complex, bringing another dimension to the rights of patients and the responsibility of the healthcare professional to do the right thing. This book looks at the four principles of medical ethics which are autonomy, justice, beneficence and non-maleficence. These allow us to consider balancing the benefits of treatment against the risks involved and avoiding harm as well as respecting patients' choices. The author has incorporated these key principles of his reflective practice into several chapters in this book themed by individual headings, each being self-contained, which can be read retrospectively in isolation. Chapters include: A Voyage to India; The Charlie Guard Case and Preparing When Things go Wrong.

I have chosen one of the chapters from this thought provoking book which demonstrates the importance of autonomous decision making, informed consent in the doctor–patient relationship, and how often a patient's autonomy could be trumped by the autonomous wills of their family.

'A Voyage to India' explores one of Sokol's experiences while observing a rural surgeon in Tamil Nadu. He recalls an elderly diabetic gentleman called Rajendran who presented with a gangrenous foot which needed an above left knee amputation. Rajendran had previously been told that he would need to have this procedure but had refused surgery through ignorance of his condition. His family told him he would get better, but the surgeon would need to fix his thigh first, so Rajendran agreed to go ahead with the procedure. The left leg was amputated above the knee, three days later Rajendran was still unaware of the amputation, even though when he reached out to touch his lower leg it was missing. His belief was the surgeon would simply reattach the limb. The surgeon believed Rajendran would come to terms with his loss and accept his relative's decision. When asked Rajendran was angrier with his relatives for lying to him than the loss of his limb.

Sokol states that medical care is too expensive for many people in India, and due to a lack of knowledge about

healthcare, help is often sought too late as in the case of Rajendran.

You could draw your own conclusions as to the decisions made by Rajendran's family. Were they acting in his best interest or could the family's decision be classed as a well-intended deception.

Lessons have been learnt in the deficiencies in care and ethics as Sokel has highlighted throughout this book, 'Ethical decisions are made under conditions that cannot be re-created'. Clinical ethics and decision

making are what healthcare professionals do, but we must make the patient our first concern.

In conclusion, this book emphasises the benefit of understanding ethics and law as this is at the heart of high-quality care and can support clinicians in complex ethico-legal decision making on a daily basis.

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