

BOOK REVIEWS

Fighting Cancer with Knowledge & Hope – A Guide for Patients, Families and Health Care Providers

Richard C. Frank

Black Inc. (2009)

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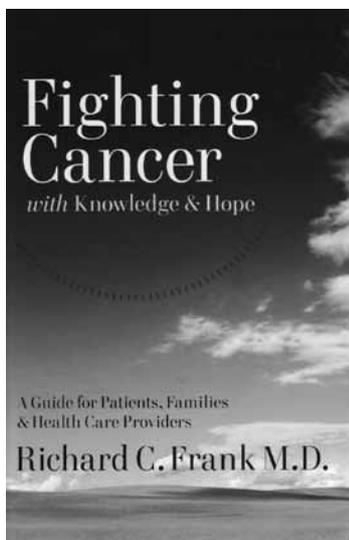
268 pages

\$29.95

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In writing this review, I first must declare a potential conflict of interest. After an ASCO “Cancer in the News” email alerted me to an article the author had penned for the Wall Street Journal, I was prompted on a whim to communicate directly with him. His short article (<http://tinyurl.com/mp7brz>) discussed the fact that despite the majority of cancers being diagnosed in older patients, the elderly are poorly represented in clinical trials. The subsequent lack of trial data then hinders appropriate treatment. As I am on the Board of International Society of Geriatric Oncology (SIOG), I could not miss an opportunity to recruit a like-minded clinician and researcher. I emailed Dr Frank to inform him of the work SIOG was doing to address this problem. He replied that he would join our organisation if I bought his book. I agreed and I am pleased to say we have both fulfilled our promises and I look forward to working with him in the future.

Fighting Cancer with Knowledge & Hope is a book written for patients, carers and health professionals. It works on many levels as a guide, a reference written in plain English and an affirmation of the holistic approach to management of the patient with cancer. Richard Frank is an oncologist in general haematology and oncology practice, who clearly has a broad understanding of the disease and who clearly also understands his patients. His writing style serves to simplify and explain the complex concepts that patients with cancer need to understand to make decisions and that I, as an oncologist, need to explain to my patients on a daily basis. I felt myself nodding in agreement with the author as I read. Although principally aimed at patients and carers, this book gives answers to all the common questions our patients have when they are faced with meeting an oncologist for the first time.



This book is divided into two sections:

1. Exposing Cancer – an explanation of what cancer is, how it develops and how we make the diagnosis and then stage the disease.
2. Attacking Cancer – how cancer is treated, how the treatments work, an explanation of adjuvant therapy, why treatments sometimes don't work and finally a chapter on survivorship.

A striking feature of this work is that it is up-to-date. Throughout the book there are references to many of the newer agents now being used in cancer treatment. New drugs are mentioned in their appropriate context with both the generic and proprietary names used in most cases. Links to websites are included throughout the text.

The writer of the foreword states that with this work Dr Frank strives to “truly demystify cancer”. There is no doubt that cancer is a complex illness and that most patients struggle with the concepts we oncologists take for granted. The author manages to simplify complex problems in a number of ways. The use of appropriate patient stories and clinical cases works to set the scene and provides a basis for further explanation. Simple illustrations and highlighted, boxed statements contribute to the readability of the text.

This book is probably most useful to the patient at first diagnosis. It stresses the need for accurate diagnosis and staging and the difficulties oncologists have predicting prognosis. The reasons for choosing the order of therapies are explained along with reasons why cancer therapies work. The chapter on survivorship issues provides practical advice, while at the same time giving hope for patients at the commencement of their “cancer journey”. Despite the fact the author practices in the US, I would have no hesitation recommending this book to my patients. If anything, this book serves to remind us that the problems our patients face are the same the world over.

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