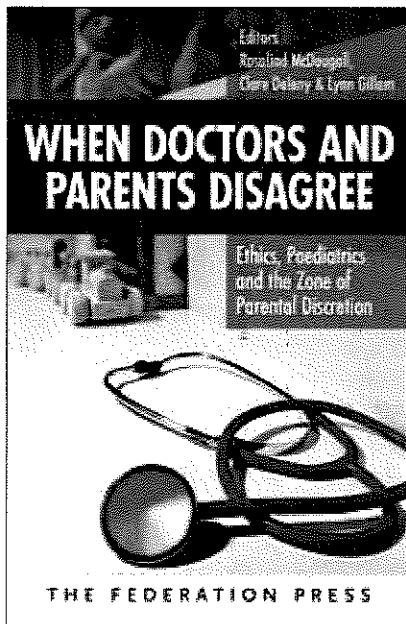


WHEN DOCTORS AND PARENTS DISAGREE: ETHICS, PAEDIATRICS AND THE ZONE OF PARENTAL DISCRETION

(2016) THE FEDERATION PRESS

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Ethical issues in health are common and paediatric health can be particularly complicated and challenging. Parents' rights to make medical decisions for their children are widely acknowledged. But is this always the best for the child? How do we determine the appropriateness of this widely held belief? What do we do when there is a disagreement between the treating team and parents?

"Doctors and Parents Disagree: Ethics, Paediatrics and the Zone of Parental Discretion" provides an interesting and informative look at the variety of ethical decisions facing health care professionals working in these areas.

The book, divided into five parts, presents real life clinical scenarios which are familiar to a range of health professionals. This is a welcome divergence from other literature in this area, which largely focuses on the dilemmas facing paediatric doctors. Of further assistance to the reader, particularly in respect to the book's usefulness as a teaching resource, is the division of case studies into three key ethically sensitive areas; clinicians encountering parental refusals of treatment, clinicians encountering parental requests for treatment and finally, clinicians encountering parental requests for interventions on healthy children.

The book also introduces, explains and explores an engaging concept known as "the zone of parental discretion (ZPD)". Quoting from the book, "The ethical tool aims to balance children's wellbeing and parents' rights to make medical

decisions for their children" and it is offered as an appropriate framework for guiding clinicians in assessing parental decision making.

ZPD re-frames the difficult and subjective concepts of "what is within the best interest of the child" and instead asks "will this decision cause probable harm?" It suggests that ZPD can be utilised in situations of entrenched disagreement, and may allow clinicians to accept parental decisions that are suboptimal for the child, so long as the decisions do not result in probable harm to the child.

The book aims to "assist doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and clinical ethics staff to deal with these ethically challenging situations", which is exactly what it does. As a social worker within this area, I found the case scenarios allow for important ethical discussion and reflection, but perhaps of greatest benefit in the book is the very real and practical support the ZPD framework provides for clinicians working through these challenging scenarios.

