

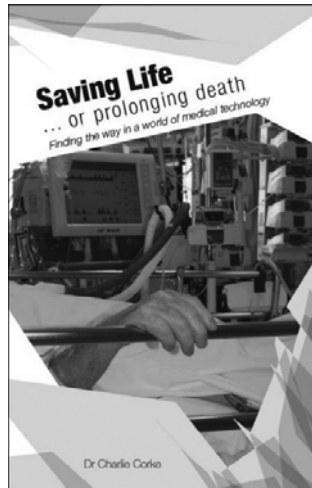
# Saving life ... or prolonging death: finding the way in the world of medical technology

Reviewed by Geoff Gutteridge

**Saving life ... or prolonging death: finding the way in the world of medical technology.** Charlie Corke. York, UK: Erudite Medical Books, 2010 (174 pp, \$A22.50). ISBN 978-0-9559086. Available at: <http://www.eruditemedicalbooks.com>

There are few more challenging areas in intensive care medicine than dealing with families of patients at the time of decision-making about the withdrawal of potentially curative medical treatment. Gaining family acceptance that there is no realistic prospect of worthwhile recovery and the inevitability of death demands much more from the art than the science of medicine.

This small book has been written to assist in the avoidance of “dysthanasia” — a term introduced to describe an unduly unpleasant, prolonged and medicalised death. It is aimed not only at doctors and nurses, but also the general public, avoiding medical terminology and providing explanations to allow understanding by the general reader. The contents are usefully included as perspectives on the ethical, patient, family, doctor, nurse, ambulance, religious, legal and media aspects. Throughout the book are numerous case studies illustrating difficulties likely to be encountered in clinical practice and real-life situations. There is very adequate discussion of the issues,



and a great deal of straightforward practical advice in how to deal with the difficulties and complexities likely to be encountered with end-of-life care.

There is emphasis on the need for appropriate advanced care planning by individuals and their families, with the appointment of a suitable surrogate before the onset of incapacitating illness. The preferred approach is then shared decision-making between the family/surrogate suitably informed about the medical issues, and the medical staff suitably informed about the patient as a person.

An increasing amount of material is now available about decision-making as death approaches. However, it would be difficult to find a more concise, straightforward and useful publication in this area. I would highly recommend this book as essential reading to all intensive care trainees. Senior medical staff would also find the book of considerable value. I wish that I had had access to such a book early in my own career.

**Geoff Gutteridge**, Intensive Care Specialist  
Austin Health, Melbourne, VIC.

**Correspondence:** [geoff.gutteridge@austin.org.au](mailto:geoff.gutteridge@austin.org.au)

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