

## BOOK REVIEW

### *Understanding Cancer: A Patient's Guide to Diagnosis, Prognosis and Treatment*

By C. Norman Coleman, M.D. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998

Reviewed By Barbara Sarah, MSW, CSW [BSarah@Benedictine.org](mailto:BSarah@Benedictine.org)

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When the doctor says, "You've got cancer" you enter a new world. This book is a gold mine of useful, detailed information that gives cancer patients the information that they need to make important decisions regarding their treatments. In clear, understandable language, Dr. Coleman guides the reader through the morass of statistics, medical terms, diagnoses and emotional issues that one faces when confronting a cancer diagnosis. This book can be of great help in assessing the benefits of treatments, interpreting the conclusions of those assessments and in general helping the patient to become a full partner in working with his or her physician to determine the course of medical treatment. Having this knowledge can empower the patient; suggestions are offered about what questions to ask, enhancing communication between the patient, the family and the doctor.

In the book's eight chapters, Coleman explains the steps involved in diagnosis and treatment; the tests patients undergo; risks and benefits of different treatments; and more. He then provides four diverse case studies and the different possibilities and options that these patients explored. Although this book focuses on conventional cancer treatments, I would have liked to see more information about complementary treatment methods, many of which have come into popular use. Nevertheless, this book can serve as a basic guide, not only for the cancer patient, but also for family members and others who interface with the patient. I wish that this book had been available when I received my cancer diagnosis ten years ago. It would have helped me to understand and make clearer decisions about my treatment choices. Now, as a professional oncology social worker, I will recommend this book to patients to help them become more knowledgeable participants in their cancer journey.□