

KNOWLEDGE CENTRAL

Barbara D. Powe, PhD, RN
Associate Editor

B O O K S

A Breath Away: Daughters Remember Mothers Lost to Smoking. Anne Wainscott-Sargent. Phoenix, AZ: Acacia Publishing, Inc., 2005, 226 pages, \$16.95.

☺ ☺ ✓ ☹ ☹ Softcover



A Breath Away portrays daughters' poignant stories of the emotional devastation and grief experienced after losing their mothers to tobacco-related death. The author, who lost her mother to lung cancer in 2004, interviewed girls and young women who shared similar experiences of losing their mothers prematurely to smoking-related diseases, the majority attributed to cigarette smoking. The purpose of the sentimental book was to pay tribute to the irreplaceable role of mothers and their legacy in their daughters' lives and to examine the common thread of loss experienced after a mother's death. The author hoped that, by telling stories of love, joy, and inevitable heartbreak, she would inspire girls and young women to choose a healthy, tobacco-free lifestyle not only for themselves but for all those whom they love.

The book is easy to read and provides a life history for each of the women who struggled with, and inevitably lost, the fight of tobacco addiction. The profound losses of the daughters interviewed and the loved ones each mother left behind are relayed through the memories and unfulfilled desires of what could have been shared: marriages, the birth of grandchildren, personal successes, etc. In the book's foreword, Cheryl Healton, president and chief executive officer of the American Legacy Foundation, states that the stories describe "all the seasons of life and hallmarks of living—marred by the loss

of loved ones gone too soon" (p. 2). Nearly 43,000 children and teenagers lose a parent to tobacco each year, and an estimated 20 million women continue to smoke today; as a result, Healton asks what each daughter searches for when discussing her relationship with her mother: How many years might we have had together? What did we miss in our lives together by your premature death? Ultimately, Healton asks the underlying and painful question, "Why?"

A Breath Away is intended for all audiences who love and care for people addicted to tobacco and especially for smokers who need to find a motivating trigger to help them quit. The book may be especially relevant for nurses because they serve as patient advocates and role models. Further, it may motivate the 15% of nurses who are current smokers to quit.

Oncology nurses at all levels of clinical practice can benefit from reading the stories in *A Breath Away* because they relate the painful emotions of daughters looking back on their mothers' lives and wondering how they, or others, could have helped to prevent premature illness and death from tobacco addiction. Anger was palpable for some daughters who did not understand addiction and would ask, "Why couldn't my mother just quit?" Commonalities existed throughout many of the stories: mothers who came from households with parents who smoked, mothers who began smoking in their teens, mothers whose husbands also smoked, and mothers who used smoking as a form of weight control. Many stories also dealt with the psychological manifestations of smoking and lung cancer—denial, guilt, remorse, and the individual struggle to understand the addictive qualities of the habit. Common threads were woven together to portray a complicated national healthcare issue—tobacco addiction and tobacco-related death. Most profound were the stories of the daughters, some of whom are nurses, who found themselves unable to quit smoking even after living through the death of their mothers.

Although *A Breath Away* is not groundbreaking, its strengths lie in each daughter's story and legacy to her mother and its recognition of the real people and lives that are behind smoking-related statistics and deaths reported in textbooks, in research journals, and by the media. The individuals depicted in the stories could be anyone's relatives. After completing the book, some readers may develop the spirit to become advocates against tobacco and lung cancer and smokers may develop the courage to meet the addiction head on and quit.

Valuable resources for tobacco cessation are provided in the book's appendix. One very valuable resource for oncology nurses, advocates, and role models for patients and laypeople who may smoke is missing: the Web site for the Tobacco-Free Nurses Initiative at www.tobaccofreenurses.org.

Nancy Jo Bush, RN, MN, MA, AOCN®
Oncology Clinical Nurse Practitioner
Assistant Clinical Professor
School of Nursing
University of California, Los Angeles
Los Angeles, CA

Nursing Against the Odds: How Health Care Cost Cutting, Media Stereotypes, and Medical Hubris Undermine Nurses and Patient Care. Suzanne Gordon. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005, 512 pages, \$29.95.

☺ ☺ ☺ ✓✓ ☹ ☹ Hardcover



The author of *Nursing Against the Odds* is a journalist who specializes in nursing issues, and although she presents a gloomy assessment of American nursing, she describes nursing as a career that offers truly meaningful and challenging work. However, she encourages nurses to speak up on their own behalf as well as on behalf of everyone who needs decent and affordable health care.

The first chapters of the book discuss dysfunctional relationships in hospitals and the media's poor portrayal of nurses. The author suggests that nurses who do not speak up

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☺ ☺ ☺ In-depth study	✓ ✓ ✓ Advanced and complex, prerequisite reading required	☹ ☹ ☹ Desk reference

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