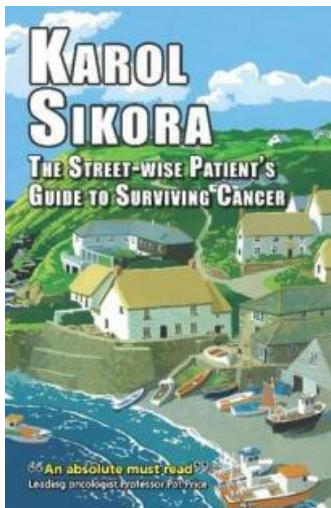


**MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT**

BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



The street-wise patient's guide to surviving cancer (2016)

Sikora K.

Brighton: Edward Everett Root, Publications, 2016.

xvi, 144pp.

ISBN 9781911204114.

£9.95.

Average star rating 3.7 (out of 5)

**Macmillan Cancer Support
89 Albert Embankment
London SE1 7UQ**

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This honest and direct book has such useful content for patients, family, and friends and is best read before starting treatment. It may also be of use to health care professionals not working in cancer care, or students for background information.

It flows well, although later chapters are weak and repetitive. It is easy to understand, with good explanations of terms and how the system works. It's not too big and the cover is attractive. Chapter 1 is engaging, positive, and acknowledges that cancer can be a chronic illness. I like the autobiographical angle; it gives a sense of reality and knowledge of what the author is talking about. The statement, "Because whether you are hysterical or stoical won't in the end make much difference at all" (p. 2) gives you permission to react how you want and not feel bad, but the rest of the chapter encourages you to take control and get the most out of the system. The author's attitude is highlighted by the statement (p. 2), "You need to understand one very simple point. The system is not actually there to help you – or at least not you alone." The book leads you through the system and tells you how to get the best for yourself. It helps you understand why some treatment decisions are made, usually why they cannot be offered. Chapter 2 is a good introduction into the cost of treatment. It is worrying but sensitive and direct. Chapter 3 "What is cancer anyway?" is very useful, easy to read and understand. Chapter 12 "Life after cancer" is reassuring and positive and the appendix with the explanations and the list of websites is excellent.

Some parts of Chapter 4 (How is cancer treated) are complicated and unnecessary, but I was surprised at the many different treatments. I felt that the author is biased about proton therapy as he works for a privately funded proton therapy company. Chapter 6 about specific cancers is good but brief; was it worth including? Chapter 8 focuses on the English drug system and could have expanded on the Welsh, Irish and Scottish systems. I was troubled by Chapter 10 "What's the receptionist called?" I have worked in hospitals and other settings as a nurse for over 30 years and do not recognise the vindictiveness of the receptionist/ secretaries described. Unfortunately, it's the one chapter that sticks with me for the wrong reasons. Chapter 13 is waffling and political; I expected it to offer a clear conclusion but it did not.

Overall, it is enlightening and a good read for patients, their families, and carers. It is well written, easy to understand and easy to read. It's best suited to those having treatment or about to start. The content delivers exactly what the title promises.

Living after breast cancer (46-55) (July 2017)

This book gives the reader information in a useful way without becoming a science text book. It has a very useful section on different cancer treatments.

It is laid out in a logical sequence; it starts with definitions of various cancers, then moves on to discuss treatments and life after cancer. The author uses language that can be understood by many readers. It is factual, but more user friendly than a textbook. There are lists of useful acronyms at the start and websites at the end. Some might consider the cover slightly misleading as it shows a beach scene and would not draw the eye of a browser.

It has been very useful for several of the members of our support group who have used it to look up specific treatments. The factual approach will appeal to a wide range of readers.

Macmillan Outreach co-ordinator (36-45) (June 2017)

An inspiring, thoughtful, well written, and easy to read book. It is useful for any type of cancer as it deals with the basic symptoms, which in a way is generic to all cancers. The author handles the subject very well and the book flows perfectly. It is very easy to understand. The cover is appealing, giving a very tranquil feeling, the paper is fine, and the typeface perfect.

I like everything about this book; it is a great book for someone experiencing cancer. It gave me a lot of comfort, as I really realised that I am not alone or unique in my quest to survive cancer.

Living with cancer (bowel and prostate) (56-65) (May 2017)

This is a fascinating insight into the perspective of oncologists and how patients can use this to get the best out of their treatment. It will help them be aware of specific questions to ask their doctors and oncologists. The background information about the author establishes his credentials in having worked for many years with people who have cancer. Having explained his background, he then considers what approaches could be beneficial to someone with cancer or their carers, when faced with a diagnosis and potential treatment options. His tone is an appealing mix of medical perspective and human experiences that he has observed. He does use technical language but does a good job of explaining it where necessary.

The various checklists would have been very helpful to me when I faced my own cancer diagnosis. When I was first told, and heard those words 'it's cancer', my brain stopped working and seemed to close my ears so that I couldn't take in what the doctor said after that. I was so stunned that I had no idea what to ask or say. I didn't have the brain power left to work out that I needed guidance in navigating the options that the diagnosis presented to me, and could have done with something like this to work on. Having said that, it all happened so fast and I was on a conveyor belt hurtling towards getting the cancer out of me as soon as possible, so I had limited time and energy to do the sort of research that would have identified a book like this.

What is missing is a foray into the perspectives of patients that Sikora has treated. However, this might have made the book too long, or diluted its purpose, which is to manage approaches to treatment, not be sucked into a world of how it feels to have cancer. I can see why this has been avoided, but it would have been good to have balanced the detached discussions about money and the pro/cons of treatments with how someone going through it might experience it. This is only a minor point.

Three years out of primary treatment for stage 4 tonsil cancer (56-65) (February 2017)

This book is great to educate not only people with a cancer diagnosis but also carers, family, and friends. The start is informative about cancer, where its name comes from and what medical terms mean. There is also lots of information on different cancers, including websites that can help people understand what their friend/family member is going through. It is perhaps most useful for medical appointments/liasing with your medical team. The layout and tone are good but the cover doesn't go with the theme.

I love the start, the facts, and the biology behind cancer, so interesting. I enjoyed the education of thinking about the NHS as a business and how I can better service my own needs. But it doesn't cover all cancers and there was no information on mine.

I really enjoyed reading this book; I feel empowered to build a relationship with my medical team that fulfils my needs as a patient. It will be very helpful for anyone at the start of their cancer journey or someone like me who has been going through it for years but hasn't been educated by my medical team on how things work. It gives the reader confidence to challenge, but to do this in the right way. I would 100% recommend this to anyone and I have encouraged my partner to read it as well.

Thyroid cancer patient (26-35) (October 2016)

This book may tell a health professional what they already know; for others, the insightful commentary on how cancer care works in the NHS and the UK in general is illuminating. The author, a leading oncologist, will not have endeared himself to some NHS managers with his frank opinions on the shortcomings of the system. Patients, however, need to understand the challenges to receiving appropriate care.

It deals with the practicalities of understanding cancer and how to receive the best treatment. By being clear about the shortcomings of care (lack of facilities such as modern radiotherapy machines, rationing of expensive drugs), Sikora seeks to empower the patient with a basic knowledge in their fight for the right treatment. The physical and emotional stress of cancer mean that patients are often not best placed to organise treatment. It is therefore invaluable for carers or family who are prepared to get involved and manage the process; it raises awareness. If you understand treatment and that professionals are fallible, you will not accept or be complacent. Always have your questions written down – you will forget the most important one. By reading this and becoming better informed via the websites suggested, you (patient or carer) should feel much more confident about tackling the rocky road ahead.

The fact that the book starts with “facing the news” and ends with “the future of cancer care” is testament to a clearly thought out and logical approach to something that is anything but. It is full of useful information and written in such a way as to provide a self-help book, the author doing a good part of the heavy lifting. It is eminently sure-footed. The author is a leading oncologist and does not talk down to his audience; a reader might almost feel like he is being talked to as an individual. The fact that Sikora is so highly qualified immediately creates a sense of trust. What also comes across is his passion for campaigning for the best possible treatment for patients. Chapter 5 is rather technical although he does provide a ‘key terminology’ section explaining the acronyms much loved by health professionals.

What I like about this book is that it provides a toolkit for patients and carers. It makes it clear that most health care professionals will do their best for you but that the system can encumber them. Just knowing this gives you an advantage; not blindly believing you are receiving the best possible treatment in a timely fashion engenders a more sceptical and questioning approach. Sikora makes it clear that this attitude is healthy; being organised and questioning brings rewards. However, it may be optimistic about how much you can influence your treatment. Consultants may tell you a treatment is not available or that you are not suitable. It may, therefore, be difficult to influence the outcome without alienating them.

This is an essential read for patients and carers; the information and facts give a feeling of being at an advantage. The fact that cancer survival rates in the UK are some of the worst in Europe means that anyone having treatment must understand the challenges and make sure they are not receiving second best. I wish it had been recommended to me. Fortunately, I am tenacious and have not allowed setbacks to undermine my determination to achieve a positive outcome. For many people, cancer is a period in their lives of, sometimes, overwhelming uncertainty that can be depressing and debilitating. This book will definitely help people struggling to cope.

Stage 4 cancer of the rectum with liver metastasis (56-65) (October 2016)

This is one of the most useful books I’ve come across and suggest that, at £10, you get yourself a copy, share it with others, have it to hand. It is a brilliant handbook, most useful for the patient who wants to be well informed. It gives you information and permission to take control of your cancer and treatment – empowerment.

Sikora is one of the world’s leading authorities on cancer, his credentials are exemplary. He tells his story from a young student in the 70s (when they thought they would find a magic bullet to cure cancer), to the present day where we see cancer as a chronic condition like others, something people are surviving and living with and needing help and funding to do so. He talks you through cancer, what it is, treatment, modern drugs, different cancers, complementary and alternative medicine (be wary of quacks), life after cancer and the politics of cancer and the future of cancer care.

I’m not sure if it is in a logical order but don’t worry about it; read it several times if you need to, it’s not very long. It is quite difficult to understand at times especially the technical parts about cancers or treatments, but persevere, find someone who can understand it for you. It’s not an appealing book to look at but it really doesn’t matter;

it's marketed as a 'street-wise guide' and we should use it like that. It's packed with useful information, websites (the five best cancer sites in the world), and where to go for more information and help.

I like everything about this book, particularly that Sikora treats me as an intelligent, informed person who knows my condition and as an expert to be listened to and respected, that he encourages me to learn more and do more and be supported. There was nothing to dislike once I'd realised it doesn't matter that it's difficult and hard going sometimes; it was challenging me to stop being lazy, find out and try harder to understand and be better informed.

Sikora doesn't shy away from the things we're not so good at in the UK, how far we are behind other countries, treatment that's difficult to get here, the parlous state of the NHS, how we are going to fund our care in future. What he's saying throughout is take control of your cancer, your treatment, don't let other people tell you what to do, but always be polite, talk to the right people from the receptionist upwards, cultivate everyone who may be useful! Don't hide behind ignorance of medical terms or drugs; find someone to help you understand. Don't avoid the internet; be discerning, there are some excellent sites. Funding is an increasing issue; with ever-more expensive cancer treatments, we may have to find funds ourselves to get the best treatment.

This is just the book I wish I'd had seven years ago, when I was first diagnosed. As time has gone on, I've become increasingly convinced that each of us is our own expert. We must control what is happening to us, liaise with our medics and support teams, know what is going on. Our amazing NHS has millions of people to care for and we have just ourselves to focus on. His final paragraph is a mantra for us all: "Build up a picture of your cancer, the diagnostic steps, and possible treatments. Find out what's available near you. With all this information, you can create a level playing field between you and your doctors, they won't be able to fob you off. Congratulations, you become an "empowered patient". Get this book, use it!

Living with non-Hodgkin lymphoma (66-75) (September 2016)

This detailed book is a very good read, whether you are a patient, or just concerned about treatment. There are many books on the subject but few with professional input and cancer patients will appreciate this. The author provides a clear understanding of treatments and their drawbacks. It flows well and all terms are well explained. The contents help the reader find items of interest and there are examples of websites at the end. It looks good, the cover reflects the contents and makes the reader feel at ease. The title is well thought out and encourages the reader to explore the contents.

This book provides a good guide to all types of cancer. I like the comments from experts, and agree with all the general comments about the subject matter. I suggest that readers use the contents page to find more detailed information. It is a very good read. It will be a good reference for anyone who knows little about cancer. I enjoyed reading the details of my cancer and the reasons for the treatments. I could 'dip in and out' of the contents and I like the history of how treatment developed over time.

Living with lymphoma (66-75) (September 2016)

This is useful for many people affected by cancer. It gives honest and practical advice, including questions to ask your treatment team. Each chapter is packed with useful information and there is a handy list of websites. Terminology is explained and much of the fear is removed – it is like having an oncologist talk you through the process. Amongst other topics, it covers different cancers and their treatment.

My initial reaction was negative, but never judge a book by its cover! Once I started reading, I couldn't stop! It is clearly set out and very user friendly. Each chapter is broken down into sub-sections, making it easy to find the information you need. It is very easy to understand and the language and tone are appropriate and comforting. It is like having the oncologist hold your hand and take care of you as you read. I felt positive after I had read it. What a great man Karol Sikora must be!

I like lots about this book. It gives lots of helpful information in a positive and helpful way. It is easy to become overwhelmed with information but this book didn't make me feel like this. It made me feel as though taking control and asking questions was the way forward. It gave me enough information to feel that I could ask my oncologist questions, which would ultimately help me and my treatment. A little knowledge...

Choosing books about cancer can be overwhelming but excellent book looks at all aspects. If you're looking for a book to help you understand treatment, cancer types, options, the future of cancer care, this is it. It is honestly written, packed with helpful advice and gives you many ways to help yourself and give yourself the best chance. It even has a chapter on complementary and alternative medicine and, again, does not dismiss these but talks about them honestly and realistically. If you're not sure which book to begin with as a cancer patient or their carer, I recommend this.

Living with bowel and secondary liver cancer (36-45) (September 2016)

This is written for an international audience by an author working in the UK. The description of the NHS is very up to date. It has universal usefulness in getting patients up to speed with knowledge and how to acquire knowledge to help them through their cancer journey with the best possible outcome. It enables readers to learn about cancer in general and its treatment. With this knowledge, patients will be better able to find out the best treatment options and make better informed decisions.

It starts with a section on key terminology, then flows logically through the history of cancer, certain cancer types, to how to navigate and advocate to get good information about the best treatments. It is a joy to read. The author has a friendly, sometimes jovial, style that will put the reader at ease even when discussing difficult subjects. The sentences are well constructed without repetition. The book is very appealing with a glossy cover. The paper is good quality and the typeface is a good size and easy to read. The paragraphs are separated by a line, which aids reading. A minor point is the limit of two levels of heading; this makes Chapter 6, with its different cancer types and treatment of each, become a flat structure as shown in the Contents. There are no illustrations, but none are required. I didn't notice any errors, just a couple of minor points: the description of proton beam therapy (p. 30) describes photons in a short paragraph without explaining that this is to compare with protons; page 73 assumes all pathologists are male.

I like everything about this book as it is written to help all patients understand how to be well informed and how to conduct themselves to get the best outcomes. There is nothing to dislike except that I would like more. It covers some cancers in detail (breast, prostate, colon, lung, lymphoma and head and neck) but I would like it to cover more, such as stomach, liver, pancreas, and kidney. However, even if you have a different cancer, the book will still be very useful. I agree completely with the quote on the front by leading oncologist Professor Pat Price “An absolute must read”; It cannot be overestimated in its potential for impact in getting up-to date knowledge to patients and getting patients to be strong advocates for themselves.

Kidney cancer survivor (66-75) (August 2016)



Sikora lifts the lid on a lottery he claims cancer patients face when being treated by the NHS. He explains how best to ‘work the system’, with advice ranging from giving gifts to doctors, nurses, and hospital staff to piecing together your own care plan. He states (p. 2): ‘The system is not actually there to help you – or at least not you alone. The system is there to maximise the quality of cancer treatment overall, to make sure the organisation and the people within it make a living and to make sure that the burden on society is not too great. Of course, much of the time, that will mean treating your cancer as quickly and effectively as possible. But, and this is the important point, not all the time. It doesn’t make much difference whether you are one of the people who get cured or not.

Millions of people need treatment each year. Sikora advises patients to take steps to avoid being lost in the system. He recommends that patients research their illness thoroughly as early as possible following diagnosis and obtain the best treatment plans from the world’s most respected private hospitals. With this information, they should create their own treatment plan and make sure the hospital sticks to it.

He then instructs patients to make sure their treatment begins right away. He believes delays of even just several weeks ‘can quite literally be life or death’, so encourages patients to keep on to their specialists if there is any postponement in their care. He also stresses how much drug availability varies between NHS hospitals. He insists personal research should again be carried out to establish what drugs work best and that patients should then demand those. In perhaps the most damning indictment of the national health provider, the cancer expert recommends those undergoing treatment become overly friendly with receptionists and consultants’ secretaries – even giving them chocolates, flowers, and wine – to help bribe them into securing you timely appointments.

This book will be most useful for anyone who wants to understand how to live with and survive cancer. It is easy to read and factual in the main, although it is highly doubtful if gifts of chocolates to GP receptionists, is a factual account of a means to speed up the appointments process!

Carer of cancer patient. Advocacy professional (56-65) (February 2017)

This is an interesting, well-written, and informative book. It begins with a biography of the author that explains his choice of career as an oncologist; he is not afraid to reveal the unpalatable fact that the NHS wants to save your life but can only do so if the price is right.

I found the technical descriptions of some of the treatments, in particular the section on radiotherapy, difficult to understand, but the advice on how to get the best possible outcome from the service and the questions to ask your consultants are invaluable. This is a down-to-earth, honest account of how the NHS deals with cancer patients and will prove useful to patients and carers alike.

Living with breast cancer (56-65) (February 2017)

This book sets out a lot of impartial information about cancer and cancer services that might help anyone looking for advice in the UK. It could be of help at different times during treatment. It is a good reference book; it tells you how to go about getting information that is sometimes hard to access, the drugs available and how to try to access different types of drugs or treatment that may not normally be offered.

I kept dipping in and out. Sometimes the terminology is hard to understand without a medical background, but overall it is easy to follow. There is a good Key Terminology section at the front and at the back useful websites that the author describes as the 'Top Five for Information'; these are listed for several countries where treatment or access to treatment and information may differ. It is printed on good quality paper and the size of the text is easy to read.

I might recommend it; it would very much depend on the person and their diagnosis. It is a good source of information. I like the factual and up-to-date information but some of the terminology is difficult to understand without a medical background. I found some of it hard to follow and some people might find it hard going. It would be useful to someone who was looking for treatment different from that being offered or seeking information on how to get a second opinion or access to certain drugs.

Colon cancer patient who is well at the moment (66-75) (December 2016)

The information in this book could interest a range of people, from patients to healthcare professionals. It considers, from a doctor's perspective, all aspects of a patient's experience of health care, from diagnosis to end of treatment and beyond. A strong theme is the importance of taking responsibility for being informed of the options available and using this information to take control of your treatment plan. Sikora stresses the importance of asking questions, and challenging respectfully and calmly, to ensure you get the most appropriate treatment. You may wish to self-fund scans, or blood tests, for example, to enable you to feel confident that treatment is working or to obtain a second opinion to ensure you are aware of all options.

The book is well organised; the type face is easy to read and the spacing aids with reading. The chapters are compact and well signposted, which gives the reader the opportunity to dip in and out. The book has a logical flow, from diagnosis, to forms of

treatment that might be considered. There is an interesting chapter discussing the importance of drugs trials, but the author is also realistic, in terms of exploring the financial aspects of trials and treatment and the impact on treatments that are made available. The book culminates in a discussion on the importance of life after treatment and looks to the future of cancer care.

Most the book is easy to understand; there are a few occasions where the language is technical and requires a more detailed level of understanding. There is a glossary. I didn't notice any factual inaccuracies, but the book was published as the Cancer Drugs Fund was closing, so this is no longer available as an option to fund treatment.

The author writes honestly about cancer, prepared to give the positives but also to explain and explore the negative aspects of receiving treatment. I like this honesty, in terms of exploring the NHS, explaining the positives and pitfalls of the system. This is balanced with a clear exploration of how we can all take responsibility for extending our knowledge of the treatments available and using this knowledge to ensure that we receive appropriate treatment. The author's suggestion that the patient may be wise to befriend the receptionist or secretary, as they have the power to support a smooth ride through the healthcare system, is an example of this honest approach.

The book includes, in the text and in an appendix, website addresses, for a range of organisations, in the UK and abroad, that will enable people to find information to develop their knowledge. Chapter five provides a range of information in relation to treatments for cancer, which is interesting and informative. In addition, the author is open to exploring alternative approaches to help the individual maintain their emotional and psychological well-being.

I like how the author does not shy away from telling patients not to be afraid of looking at survival rates, pointing out that this is an individual journey, medical knowledge not being able to explain why some individuals survive against the odds. However, the author is also upfront in acknowledging the financial cost of treating cancer and the impact this may have in relation to the treatment plan, hence the importance of being responsible for yourself.

It is not particularly a dislike, more an observation: the author, on a few occasions, suggests it might not be advantageous to be anything but calm and polite, to doctors if you wish to receive the best possible treatment. I would argue that, on occasion, it might be beneficial for the medical profession to appreciate that you are frustrated (without being offensive); this may not always be possible if you are completely calm.

This book is useful to aid a person's understanding in several ways in relation to cancer; for example, it describes how cancer develops and considers, in general terms, the various treatment that are available. In addition, the author does describe the main cancers in more detail, in terms of diagnosis and treatment.

Living with the effects of bowel cancer (46-55) (November 2016)

Anyone interested in learning about and understanding cancer and its treatments, the challenges of an ageing population, financial restraints within the NHS versus advances in technology, and the opportunity for safer and personalised treatments that involve expensive treatment will find this book hugely interesting. It will be most useful following diagnosis but can be referred to as and when needed.

The author is a caring professional who tries hard to explain everything using basic language but there are times when he uses unfamiliar terminology and these will need to be revisited by people affected by cancer. The cover is warming, but the text is too wordy; however, short chapters help the reader digest the heavy content. The font feels small but the tone is encouraging and empowering.

It tells the truth as it is, particularly around advances in technology that open doors to less invasive treatment, but also flags up the financial challenges faced by the NHS. It prompts patients to take control from the start by being active and making the service work for them. It discusses a person-centred approach and addresses all the options that can benefit to the individual, it introduces new technology and explains the differences – a very good start to a conversation with health professionals.

It is more of a concern than a dislike: I am not convinced that those who have the greatest need will be able to grasp the content or apply the advice. The impact of a cancer diagnosis is unique, particularly the psychological, and regardless of status or profession one may feel overwhelmed. Perhaps it will be more useful in information centres/support groups where a group discussion could prove more beneficial.

Living with the consequences of breast cancer (56-65) (October 2016)

This is an impressive book, full of information about cancer and how the system works. The message is that patients need to learn how the system works and make sure it works for us all the time. It is therefore particularly valuable for people who can make use of this information, be pro-active, and apply it to their own situation.

The author handles the topic in a logical order and I found it easy to understand; the language is appropriate for his audience, who want to learn more about cancer. The author provides a list of key terms at the beginning. Some passages may require more of an effort for a non-scientist to understand, for example on the different types of radiotherapy, but the effort is worth it. There is an appendix on “Using the web wisely” that lists the author’s recommendations for the top five websites for reliable information, and provides details of several other relevant sites, on specific cancers, with his comments. Sites are included for the UK and for the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The cover is a colourful and appealing, showing a scene in Cornwall. The typeface is clear, and easy to read. The index sets out what is included in each of the 13 chapters. Chapter headings are bold, and throughout each chapter each page is also headed clearly with the chapter heading. It is therefore very easy for the reader to find the section that he/she is looking for.

I like the author’s writing style, which is clear, professional, and friendly. He has a very clear message for the reader, which is that, as patients, we need to learn how to make the system work for us; in this book, he is providing the information that we

need to do this. I like the way he wants to empower patients. There are several checklists for patients to use as guides; e.g. on your treatment plan; before undergoing surgery or radiotherapy; questions to ask about immunotherapy. I didn't dislike anything about the book but I did find parts of chapter 10 uncomfortable. In this chapter, he advises patients to buy presents for the receptionist and the consultant's secretary. He describes the ways in which your treatment plan can be enhanced or delayed by key members of the administrative staff, and the importance therefore of cultivating these relationships.

This book does not set out to provide emotional support, but its tone is very positive. It is full of facts and information, about cancer, its treatment, and the history of various treatments. There is also discussion about the future of treatment. It does not focus on one cancer, but in chapter 6, there is valuable information on several cancers, and on their usual treatment. The subheading of chapter 8 is "how to find out what you can get and then get it" and here he urges patients to do a lot of research on the health systems in their own area, and to find out where the cost pressures are, so that they can make sure they get the very best treatment available, even if it means getting it from a different health authority.

I will probably recommend it. My only hesitation will be if I feel that the recipient will not be able to respond to the message about "making the system work for you".

Survivor of breast cancer and melanoma (66-75) (October 2016)

There is nothing worse than not knowing fully what disease I have and its prognosis. This book will help allay the fears of someone diagnosed; it will also help others to understand what cancer is and support and guide the patient more. It is informative from the start, laying out what cancer is (some people still think that you can catch it), the types, and then the breakthroughs that have enabled treatment based on the patient's genes. I find this fascinating and there should be more publicity about this.

It is laid out well and the chapters flow well and are easy to find. For the most part, it is easy to understand; in places, it is more complicated. The cover is nothing special. The author's name is larger than the title so readers may overlook this book as being about cancer. The typeface is just right for older people.

It is very informative about the different types of cancer, helps to give information about ongoing treatment, and is especially good at showing us breakthroughs in treatment tailored to the individual. I don't like chapter eight; it is not helpful to learn that one patient's health authority may not spend as much on treatment as another's.

It is good that the author has put in the cost of cancer treatment. People are unaware of the cost. We think that the cost shouldn't matter but the NHS is not a bottomless pit and it can't possibly, nor should it, spend millions on one individual, hard as this sounds. Based on the findings in this book, donating to cancer research is of true benefit – the public should be made more aware of the breakthroughs.

Post mastectomy for DCIS with ongoing tamoxifen (46-55) (September 2016)



Of all the books that I've reviewed, this is the one I struggled with the most. Its title gave me the impression that it would be positive, upbeat, a 'How to' book on treatment. There are thorough explanations of cancer and treatments and a comprehensive list of useful websites but it reads like a textbook and I do wonder at whom it is directed. Some readers might find it complex in parts; it would have overwhelmed me during treatment, particularly in the early stages when I was trying to come to terms with my diagnosis and the fact that I might die. I struggled with the emotionless tone at times.

The author provides very comprehensive guidance on the types of cancer, the treatments available and the future of treatment. There are also helpful lists of the best websites on cancer treatment currently available. It's up to date (published 2016). The author was one of the doctors who treated Abdelbaset al Megrahi, the 'Lockerbie bomber', when he was diagnosed with prostate cancer and the book gives an interesting insight into what was really going on behind the scenes.

However, the tone is, on occasion, patronising and cynical. One of the worst passages is the advice on how to get the best from staff. He advises making friends with the receptionist: 'She is almost certainly lowly-paid and may well have thwarted ambitions or a difficult home life as well. But she will be a fundamentally well-meaning person. Treat her kindly. She needs to be made to feel good somehow... give her a small gift.' I was stunned and insulted on behalf of all the wonderful medical receptionists (male and female) I encountered during my cancer care.

It might be helpful for the relative or friend of someone having treatment, rather than the patient. If you're a step removed from treatment, you may find the rather textbook tone easier to handle. However, it may be useful for patients who want a more emotionless, textbook style of writing about cancer treatment, its history and future.

Cancer survivor (Burkitt lymphoma) (36-45) (November 2016)

This is a good book for information to help people navigate through the labyrinth of treatment. It will be useful after diagnosis when facing choices of treatment. It is well written and easy to follow. It is very easy to understand and technical and medical words and phrases are well explained. The layout is good and I like the title, but the cover does not reflect the title... a bit twee for me.

There isn't anything I disliked but I did find a part of chapter 10 very patronising towards receptionists. It is fine to remind people to not to take their frustration, fear and anger out on people who are there to help, but to suggest that they are doing that job because they could not get anything better seems somewhat insulting.

It is quite useful and I might recommend it but it is hard-hitting, the author pulls no punches. It is a bit of a shock when one is, maybe, feeling very vulnerable, to read, "The system is not actually there to help you – or at least not you alone."

Endometrial cancer survivor (56-65) (October 2016)

From the title, I assumed this book would be suitable for lay people – it boasts to be a street-wise guide. However, it is far from that and I was disappointed by the design and content. The design is confusing (I am unsure how it links to the topic but am happy to concede that I may be missing something); the pages feel overwhelmingly full and there is a lot of text which is quite small. The topics are handled in a logical order and the chapters and sections are small so it can be digested in bite-sized pieces, but the author uses quite professional language. He uses words like ‘approach’ and ‘heterogeneous’ which can be hard for lay people to understand.

I like the fact that so many topics are covered. It is comprehensive for sure, if a little incomplete. I found the section on head and neck cancers slightly inaccurate because that was not my understanding or experience, but my cancer is very rare. I was looking forward to reading a book that covered acinic cell carcinoma on some level but was disappointed to find it is not touched on in such a detailed book.

Acinic cell carcinoma survivor (36-45) (September 2016)

This is a useful book for anyone who wants to be practical and proactive. It is helpful for patients and those supporting them as it has good tips around the practicalities of discussing treatment with doctors; for example, the lists of questions to ask your doctor. It is helpful for carers or people who know someone affected by cancer; for me it was helpful in terms of getting used to an idea that a loved one’s cancer will be chronic but that doesn’t mean losing hope. It’s interesting that everyone sees curing cancer as the aim, whereas containing or managing it is still an optimum outcome.

There is a logical order to the contents. It is quite technical in places and although it is simply written it can still be hard to understand lots of terminology. However, there is a good glossary. More illustrations would make it an easier read.

The author is blunt and uses commendable honesty, giving the reader an insight to the obstacles in healthcare systems. The main aim of the book is to help people to feel more informed about being empowered to take control over their treatment, there are lots of practical tips and advice to help achieve this. The author recommends 100 websites, which just shows how overwhelming all the information about cancer is!

Overall, there are some good sections and practical tips to help people affected by cancer and their carers/families to try to be proactive. However, this is easier said than done. The author doesn’t fully acknowledge or appreciate that patients and their carers or families may not be able to take on new information or manipulate the health system to work for them. Some people may be unable to take on lots of detail about their cancer and prognosis. The author doesn’t acknowledge how hard day-to-day life can be; sometimes going to appointments and having treatment can be overwhelming and draining on its own! He assumes that you are in a strong position to use knowledge to access the best care; if you are not, it can feel disheartening.

Daughter of bowel and secondary liver cancer patient (26-35) (September 2016)

An important aspect of this book is the positive way in which it is written, which is clearly conveyed to the reader. The author is pragmatic: your cancer may never be cured and you may live with it for the rest of your life, but taking control of your treatment is a very important part of the battle that can be won.

It is quite well laid out and easy to read and understand; there is a glossary of terminology and acronyms at the beginning. It is heavily loaded with facts and figures but not in a confusing way. The tone is factual and honest and Professor Sikora pulls no punches about the NHS and what you can expect as a patient. I'm not sure the cover picture of a harbour is ideal, but it's very difficult when the subject is cancer. There are no pictures or images in the book but I wouldn't expect or want any.

It is a surprisingly easy read. I like the fact that the author is very honest about the NHS but that, in his words, arming yourself with as much information as possible, and trying to take control, alongside your consultant, is key to it all. The patient must know how "the system" works to get the best treatment. I also like the upbeat style, the author saying that the battle against cancer can be won although you may live with it as a chronic condition for the rest of your life.

There are a lot of acronyms to wade through but this goes with the territory. The few pages of autobiography, whilst interesting, didn't help me as a patient. Chapter 6 contains a lot on specific cancers but mine wasn't amongst them, so I skipped through it. Another chapter contains information on different types of treatment (for example proton beam therapy) and again, because it wasn't relevant to me, I skipped it. His advice to get to know the name of my consultant's secretary and buy her a small gift didn't seem very appropriate in terms of getting "the system" to work for me. Nor would I be confident enough to ask for a copy of the pathology report as I'd need a medical expert to interpret it for me anyway.

Overall, I found this book quite good and easy to read, despite the many facts, figures, and acronyms/abbreviations. The first page has five reviews, but all from other eminent oncologists and not one from a cancer patient to say how helpful (or not) the book is! Maybe this will change in future editions.

Living with ovarian cancer (46-55) (September 2016)

This book is explicitly aimed at recently diagnosed patients and therefore focused on that perspective. Nevertheless, close carers may also benefit by heeding the advice and passing it on to the patient. It will be most useful immediately after diagnosis. The core message is to take control and responsibility for the treatment pathway; for this reason, most benefit would be gained by reading the book early in the process.

There is a broad logic to the structure although a high proportion of the content is not directly relevant to the title and core message. The book addresses a wide variety of issues and themes and perhaps because of this some sections use very technical language whilst others are extremely readable for the layman. I found some sections virtually unreadable but others were interesting and accessible. It's a short book with a large typeface and clear sections so in this regard it appears quite accessible. I like several aspects, as follows:

- The core message, that a cancer patient should seek to take control of their treatment, is one with which I completely agree and is a principle I followed myself during my own journey.
- There are some helpful sections full of practical advice and candid explanations regarding the realities of cancer care.
- Other sections contained interesting background and detail, e.g. what cancer is, the economics of cancer.
- There are helpful checklists of questions to ask and websites to explore.

There are a few aspects I disliked:

- There's a fair amount of digression from the title and core message; the practical advice suggested by the title doesn't appear until page 89 of 126!
- A high proportion of content does not seem relevant, e.g. the history of cancer drug development, the future of cancer care. Much of this offers few insights to the recently diagnosed patient.
- Other content is better addressed on more specialist websites and is therefore superfluous here, e.g. types of cancer, types of treatment.
- It is missing some advice that could add value, e.g. whose advice is worth listening to, how to distinguish between helpful and unhelpful advice, and how to obtain psychological support.

It's very useful in places and not at all useful in others, so quite a paradox. However, as a quick read, especially if one skips the background and less relevant sections, one can readily access the helpful content. The high-value content is worth five stars but the less relevant technicalities and background are of no value, so three stars is a compromise! The book could easily be edited into a readable and useful pamphlet.

Testicular cancer survivor (56-65) (August 2016)



This is aimed patients, but there is a lot of information to take on board; it might be better relayed to them by a friend or family member and it might help family and friends gain some perspective about what a cancer diagnosis means. It is most useful for the practical information: the cost of an MRI; questions to ask the doctors; working out how to speak to the many healthcare professionals. In the heat of the moment, they are all things that you're unable to think about, so it is useful to be able to read this and work out what information would be valuable to each person.

It is well planned and laid out well with headings and it is easy to find specific bits of information. A few chapters are not particularly interesting or relevant; for example, there is a section on how it can be nice to give a gift to the people treating you; this is a nice touch, but it's not necessary to include it. The author also writes about how a patient gave him £500. It doesn't say if he accepted it or not, but it feels as if he is pushing for everyone to receive gifts for doing their job – that could cause problems.

I don't like the writing style writing and the book doesn't read very well. For example, the author asks many questions that, presumably, the patient will be thinking. He also uses lots of paragraphs, some only a couple of sentences long; this may break up lots of information quite well, but I find it hard to read properly. There is a glossary and some good websites and references for information, which would be helpful.

I do accept that finding an appropriate picture for the cover of a cancer self-help book is challenging but the front cover seems bizarre; it is a dated painting of a seafront, which does not have much relevance to the content. There are no pictures inside the book. Having a few pictures might break up the page after page of text.

On reflection, I probably should not have chosen to review this book; I do not find self-help books useful and would never opt to read one in my moment of need. However, it could be helpful and life saving for someone else. Each to their own; if I knew someone who would be likely to find comfort and useful information from this book I would recommend it, but it's not for me.

Daughter of metastatic breast cancer patient (26-35) (January 2017)

This book may suit anyone diagnosed with a cancer that is not terminal but many sections are complicated, regardless of technical terms. It could have been written in a simpler language as it is the 'street-wise' guide, i.e. the layperson's guide. There are parts that only those in the medical profession will understand.

There are many errors in punctuation and spelling mistakes throughout. I have a proofreading background and find that most books today rely on computers for this instead of the human eye and this results in many issues. Chapter 1 is mostly an autobiography of the author, which didn't interest me. If I was reading the book as someone with cancer I would skip this and move straight to the required section(s).

If I saw this book in a shop or library and skimmed it to see if it was what I needed, then, after noticing the errors, I would put it back. The content needs simplifying and the publishers should do a thorough proofread prior to publication.

Macmillan volunteer (56-65) (November 2016)



I didn't find this book easy to read. It took three attempts to finish it. A lot of it is for an American audience. It is very heavy going and prone to talk about cost incessantly; this is not something you want when you are ill and looking for advice. I found the author overbearing and out of touch with the usual NHS patient.

Living with non-Hodgkin lymphoma (66-75) (December 2016)

Unfortunately, this book is suitable only for health professionals. Some of the detail should not be read by anyone emotionally involved with cancer, i.e. the patient or the patient's nearest and dearest. The content is in excellent logical order and I didn't notice any inaccuracies but the descriptions of methods to make your health service work for you, sometimes against professional advice, could be inaccurate.

It is an excellent book (sometimes a bit too technical for the lay person), but spoiled by constant statements about how you can be fobbed off with a set procedure unless you harass your team for "better" procedures and drugs. I expect my team to do their best for me and my type and stage of cancer without me harassing them about something I have read in a book. The title promises an interesting read but it isn't.

In remission from colon cancer (66-75) (September 2016)

This is a highly subjective and personal book, based on the author's experience, not backed up by examples or data. He spends a great deal of time talking about the politics of treatment and the need to be proactive in establishing care plans. I am not sure how useful it will be for anyone who is seeking a guide to surviving cancer. The explanations of what cancer is may be useful, but this could be found in other reliable sources (e.g. Macmillan or CRUK) at no cost.

Before reading it, I undertook some research on Professor Sikora. He has a high media profile, significantly in the Al-Megrahi case, which he mentions, attempting to distance himself from its outcome. He was the subject of complaints of misleading the public by claiming he had an honorary fellowship at Imperial College London (Guardian 22/05/09). There are other articles, including one where he suggests cancer treatment should not be wasted on the elderly. This has been interpreted and misinterpreted, but nevertheless, he can be considered controversial. It is significant that the testimonials are from clinicians, not patients.

By marketing this as *The street-wise patient's guide to surviving cancer*, there is an expectation that it is an impartial guide to getting the best treatment. However, the author does not seem to understand that cancer patients are very ill and will not have the strength or stamina to undertake significant research into cancer drug trials in the USA (why would they?) and that the carer is the likely person who will need clear, concise pointers. He suggests (p. 58) 'You have to ask around', but doesn't suggest where. He mentions in passing that it's a good idea to ask your GP, your friends.

Some of the anecdotal matter is easy to understand, but explanations of radiotherapy formulae are of limited value if all you need to know is if a particular hospital has a good record in treatment and if it carries data on long- or short-term consequences.

I dislike most of the content of this book:

- On page 29, the author says that there are massive regional variations in the quality of radiotherapy, from 3% to 80%. Of what, he does not say, but does go on to say it's necessary to find out what's available to you and where. He does not suggest how you access this information or what the sources of help may be. He states (p. 28) that with IMRT there is little chance of dosage to

normal tissue. He does not mention long-term consequences, say, to pelvic organs, and how this arises.

- On page 87, he mentions NATCANSAT (National Clinical Analysis & Specialised Applications Team) as a source of information for radiotherapy quality. It would be difficult for a layman, even a well informed and already streetwise layman, to wade through their statistics. According to NATCANSAT, Public Health England have taken over this role of data collection and are publishing the comparative outcomes. These should help patients understand the radiotherapy facilities available at each hospital. I suggest in the first instance contacting the [National Cancer Intelligence Network](#).
- The author is dismissive of counselling provided within NHS structures, stating (p. 90) that counsellors 'are not medically trained.' And won't help you through cancer treatment. I don't know if they are medically trained but they certainly provide invaluable support to people affected by cancer.
- One useful thing the author does mention, is asking for the original pathology report once cancer has been diagnosed. However, he then says (p. 91) that 'in my experience, the initial diagnosis is rarely wrong'. This is alarming; the premise is to take control, yet he doesn't consider whether clinicians are best skilled or experienced to give the best treatment. He recognises the broad intention of the NHS to give an overarching high quality of care, but not individual care, yet discourages the patient from seeking Centres of Excellence, for example, by indicating the doctor is probably right, and the important thing is to establish how treatment will progress.
- I was flabbergasted at the blithe assumptions (p. 104) that paying out £500-£700 for an MRI scan, or £300 for a private second opinion is worthwhile weighed against the cost of curing cancer. This is what has happened in our household but this book is targeted at the NHS patient, many of whom struggle to survive financially, let alone pay for diagnostics or private consultations.
- In the appendix, the list covers website information and the top of the top five is an American website. I am not sure how details of clinical trials are going to be helpful for someone needing treatment today. Three of the top five are American. The other two are Macmillan and CRUK.

I could cite many more examples but from a carer's viewpoint these are the significant gaps in this 'must-read' book.

- How do I find out if my local hospital has a good record on cancer treatment and dealing with consequences?
- Given that consequences of cancer affect around 500,000 people in the UK, this is not mentioned, even in passing.
- Where do I go, when I 'look around' for good cancer treatment?

The author says (p. 3) 'it's not tailored to your problem or your country but it will help you go to the web and find out more about exactly what your problem is. The internet, if used correctly, will act as your guide to the best treatment for you..'. I know that already. This book purports to be 'An absolute must read', but it is not.

Carer for husband living with long-term consequences of prostate cancer treatment (56-65) (August 2016)

Further information

Why does Macmillan Cancer Support review books?

We use reviews to help us compile a list of suggested cancer books, the [Macmillan Core Book List](#). Cancer information centres and public libraries can use this list to select appropriate and relevant books for people affected by cancer.

We add reviews to the [Directory of information materials for people affected by cancer](#) so that people affected by cancer can see what others in a similar situation think about a book. You can also see details of all the books reviewed in the [Book reviews listing](#), which also has links to all the reviews.

We recruit most of our reviewers through the [Volunteering Village](#) and the [Cancer Voices Network](#), people affected by cancer who have signed up to help Macmillan Cancer Support in a number of ways. Volunteers are a vital part of our book review process; since 2007, over 1,500 Macmillan volunteers have written more than 6,000 reviews of over 500 different books.

If you are a health professional who would like to review books for us, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

Information and support for people affected by cancer

If you are looking for support to help you live life with cancer, you may wish to contact one of [Macmillan's cancer information and support services](#). Or you can call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00** (Mon-Fri 9am–8pm). We have an interpreting service in over 200 languages. Just state, in English, the language you wish to use. If you are deaf or hard of hearing you can use textphone no 0808 808 0121 or Text Relay.

You can also email us using the [website enquiry form](#). Alternatively, [visit our website](#).

Feedback

If you have any comments, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

Being told ‘you have cancer’ can affect so much more than your health – it can also affect your family, your job, even your ability to pay the bills. But you’re still you. We get that. And, after over 100 years of helping people through cancer, we get what’s most important: that you’re treated as a person, not just a patient.

It’s why we’ll take the time to understand you and all that matters to you, so we can help you get the support you need to take care of your health, protect your personal relationships and deal with money and work worries.

We’re here to help you find your best way through from the moment of diagnosis, so you’re able to live life as fully as you can. For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00 or visit macmillan.org.uk

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