



## Book Reviews

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#### [.AIMS Journal, 2013, Vol 25 No 4](#)

#### **Law, Policy and Reproductive Autonomy by Erin Nelson**

Hart 2013

ISBN-10: 1841138673

ISBN-13: 978-1841138671

RRP £60.00

Reviewed by

Vicki Williams

[Find this book on Amazon](#)

#### **Health and Human Rights by Thérèse Murphy**

Health and Human Rights

ISBN-10: 1841138045

ISBN-13: 978-1841138046

RRP £45.00

Reviewed by

Vicki Williams

[Find this book on Amazon](#)

I won't pretend that these are typical of the kind of books AIMS reviews, and I rather hope that they won't be needed by most of our readers. I am also aware that they are very specific, and more than a little dry if your interest in the law is fleeting, and with that in mind, this review is intentionally very brief.

I was sent these books for review, and my first thought was to put them on the shelf to do later... Then I thought that if I did that they may well remain there, unopened, so I flicked through and then read them.

Both books look at the law as it stands as well as the history of reproductive laws and policies, and helps put it into context, but they do tend towards the American. Both explore those areas where law, public opinion, medical practice and a woman's individual needs meet, overlap, diverge and conflict. Both are heavily referenced, but I was a little surprised at the lack of midwifery, feminist or autonomy texts used in either book, and the language is sadly more medical than woman-centered - the use of the word 'delivery' rather than 'birth', for example, is pervasive. Having said that, these books are clearly aimed at medics, scholars and lawyers, rather than women, and perhaps that is intentional to make the reader feel comfortable whilst introducing some concepts that will deeply challenge their ways of working.

They are, in all honesty, probably no better for woman making decisions in the UK than the AIMS book 'Am I Allowed?' and they aren't cheap

However, what I will say is that I think they are a concise and accessible and that they should be on the shelf and used as a reference manual by all managers, supervisors and commissioners of maternity services. I also think that if you are involved in a complaint, campaign or quest for care that is right for you then these two books might well be very useful, not only in exploring your rights, but also (and this, I think, might be one of their most valuable uses) as a starting point for discussions, negotiations and statements of intent.

I also suspect that, whilst these books are not ever going to be a substitute for good and experienced legal advice from those who have an in-depth knowledge, they might well be a huge help in asking the right questions to sift out those who do have the right legal expertise for your situation should you find yourself in a position where you want or need it.

My favourite quotes are both from the section on caesarean delivery on maternal request; '... a longer list of choices may well not be experienced by those making the choice as autonomy-enhancing.' I agree completely, and the second; 'This is exactly why we need a robust feminist conception of reproductive autonomy - to preserve the space in which each woman can make her reproductive decisions for herself.'

As a compliment to the support offered by organisations working with AIMS, such as Birthrights and M4M, we should be making sure that those who make the policies know the law, and accessible explanations from multiple angles might help achieve that.