In April 2003, the Human Genome Project, one of the great feats of scientific exploration in history, was completed at least two years ahead of expectation, and at the same time a revolution in biological research began. The completion of a high-quality, comprehensive sequencing of the human genome brought along the realization that society needs a similar exploration and advancement of the social sciences that will help to apply and communicate the newly discovered knowledge to those whose lives will most be affected by it. One of these sciences, genetic counseling in particular, did not exist 15 years ago, and now it is at the forefront of health prevention and treatment strategies of inherited diseases.

In this context, *Genetic Testing for Cancer: Psychological Approaches for Helping Patients and Families* aims to introduce this new field to professionals of all disciplines involved in cancer care. It is a valuable addition to the existing, limited literature and one that will be equally useful to researchers and clinicians. The author, Andrea Farkas Patenaude, is a seasoned clinician and researcher herself, and her wealth of experience is evident throughout the book, especially in her insightful description of the genetic counseling process. Her aim is to share how individuals and families cope with concerns related to hereditary cancer risk, how they cope with genetic information, and eventually how they make tough choices informed by this knowledge. After reading the book, I felt that these aims were accomplished, and the reality of the genetic counseling situation was brought to life by vividly elucidated case studies.

The book consists of 10 well-structured and well-presented chapters that guide the reader through the basic knowledge required to understand cancer genes, cancer risk, and genetic counseling for suspected carriers of cancer genes. In addition, the chapters also include psychological issues, such as unresolved grief, emotional distress, risk perception, and health beliefs and behaviors. Finally, also discussed are the disclosure of the results of cancer genetic testing, prophylactic surgery, the reaction of the family, and social and ethical issues related to genetic counseling.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide the necessary background information to cancer, genes, and cancer genes and gene-related cancer risk. The author reviews cancer incidence and mortality statistics to help the reader focus on the societal impact of cancer and, thus, the importance of changes in cancer diagnosis or treatment related to genetics. The discussion then turns to the basic genetic concepts central to understanding the likely medical
consequences of an inherited mutation in a specific gene. Finally, a description is offered of hereditary predispositions conveyed by the currently identified cancer genes.

Theoretically, the steps by which genetic risk information will lead to improved health are straightforward and simple: An individual obtains genome-based information about his or her own health risks that they use to develop and implement an individualized prevention or treatment plan. This results in improved quality and maybe quantity of health for the individual and reduced costs for the health care system. In real life, however, things are not as simple. Human beings are complex, and they think, feel, and behave in many and unpredictable ways. Chapter 4 emphasizes the difficulties of imparting genetic information that by its nature is complex and dynamic and contains areas of uncertainty. This makes the individual characteristics of coping style and psychological vulnerability critical in determining whether the information will be an asset or a liability for the individual who receives it. Patients who are found to carry a genetic mutation are given options in prevention and treatment. The option that they choose depends primarily on psychological factors, and in the following chapter the author considers the psychological issues involved for patients who consider and opt for drastic treatments, such as prophylactic mastectomy, oophorectomy, or colectomy.

Chapter 7 is about how families cope with genetic testing. It has to be remembered that it is within the context of the family that genetic medicine will have substantial impact. Various factors determine how families integrate genetic information and how relationships between members are positively affected or not affected by such information. The emotionally evocative and professionally difficult issue of children and genetic testing is dealt with in Chapter 8. There is little hard evidence in this area to guide clinical practice, and a lot of our knowledge is based on anecdotal clinical reports and clinical intuition. Here the author manages to summarize the limited available research, and her wealth of clinical experience is again evident in her succinct and insightful presentation of the topic.

Throughout the book the necessity for further research is emphasized. Research that critically evaluates new genetic tests and interventions in terms of parameters, such as benefits (medical and psychological, for the individual and society), access, and cost is required. Such research should be interdisciplinary and use the tools and expertise of many fields, including genomics, health education, health psychology, and health care economics.

The book concludes with Chapters 9 and 10 where prominent ethical issues that may impact patients with genetic concerns are reviewed, including the duty to warn, autonomy, privacy, and discrimination. I enjoyed reading this book, and I believe that the author's hope will be realized. This book will certainly "empower its readers to feel better prepared for the journey ahead as we increasingly integrate and use knowledge of those aspects of our fate that are encoded at conception" (p. 275).