

(or a disease syndrome). By means of a textbook analysis, we aim to trace the roots of this linguistic confusion as they grow in the soil of undergraduate medical education.

We have examined how aging is described in medical textbooks. Textbooks accompany the medical curriculum, represent the roots of medical education and build a foundation for the values and attitudes in medicine. How frameworks of ideas are maintained within different fields can be discovered by textbook analysis.<sup>20</sup> How textbooks present aging is likely to be a major determinant of the medical view of the aging *vs.* disease dichotomy. The textbook analysis also served several additional purposes.

- To supplement the findings of the Tikkinen *et al.*<sup>1</sup> study; in particular to probe whether they are representative of attitudes beyond Finland.
- To add a qualitative dimension to the Finnish study; if aging is not viewed as a disease, then how is it viewed?
- To test the claim<sup>6</sup> that medical textbooks do not sufficiently deal with aging. As far as we can ascertain, a formal medical textbook analysis to this end has not been conducted before.
- To create a foundation for future, more detailed investigations of this issue.

Textbook analyses have been used in research before, for example to look at multiple editions of the same textbook to understand how the presentation of obesity has changed,<sup>24</sup> and how the idea of giving medical prognoses has faded over the years.<sup>25</sup> Other studies have looked at a range of textbooks to assess whether they provide adequate factual information on specific topics<sup>26–28</sup> or adequate patient-orientated communication skills.<sup>29</sup>

Our main aim here is to discover how medical textbooks present the relationship between aging and disease. In particular, do they specifically argue the existence of a separate, non-pathological process of aging? If so, what is the justification for this separation? And what are the criteria for deciding which deteriorative age-changes are part of normal aging, and which are pathological changes?

### 2.2.2.1 Methodology

**2.2.2.1.1 Textbook Selection.** The study was conducted in University College London (UCL) libraries. For the final analysis, 14 textbooks were selected. Due to the great number and variety of medical textbooks, the selection process was not straightforward. Medicine is divided into more than 40 disciplines with separate textbooks.<sup>30</sup> An interesting question is how aging is understood in different medical disciplines, but this lies beyond the scope of this study. Instead, we focus on textbooks of general clinical medicine, also known as reference books. These textbooks include factual knowledge to practise medicine, explain basic science, research evidence and the context of underlying principles. Moreover, they outline how to apply this knowledge