



Handbook for Mortals: Guidance for People Facing Serious Illness

By Joanne Lynn, Janice Lynch Schuster, Joan Harrold

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Modern medical technology has changed not only the way we live but also the way we die. Until two generations ago, people usually died suddenly, after an accident or serious illness. Now, most of us will live with chronic conditions, and our dying will usually take longer, require more care, and demand more planning than ever before.

Handbook for Mortals is warmly addressed to all those who wish to approach the final years of life with greater awareness of what to expect and greater confidence about how to make the end of their lives a time of growth, comfort, and meaningful reflection. Written by Dr. Joanne Lynn and a team of experts, this book provides equal measures of practical information and wise counsel. Readers will learn what decisions they will need to face, what choices are available to them, where to look for help, how to ease pain and other symptoms, what to expect with specific diseases, how the health-care system operates, and how the entire experience affects dying persons, their families, and their friends. Such practical information is indispensable. But equally important are the personal stories included here of how people have come to terms with serious illness and dying, how they have faced their fears and made their choices. These give us moving firsthand insights into a profoundly important process, one that is often kept hidden in our culture.

From down-to-earth advice on how to talk to your doctor to inspiring quotes from such writers as Emily Dickinson, W. H. Auden, Jane Kenyon, and others, *Handbook for Mortals* addresses the needs of both the body and the spirit in our final years.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Written for caregivers as well as the dying, *Handbook for Mortals* is an excellent resource for anyone facing the end of life. Authors Joanne Lynn, M.D., and Joan Harrold, M.D., offer sensitive and practical advice for the ambiguous final stage of a life-threatening illness--when hope for a recovery is waning and the patient and family members are turning toward a different horizon, that of accepting and supporting an imminent death. For the most part, the authors focus on physical concerns such as pain management, artificial feeding, and an especially poignant passage about assisted suicide.

Because of their backgrounds, the authors are also comfortable discussing the emotional complexities of dying, such as offering advice on giving and receiving forgiveness and resolving conflicts in close relationships. (Lynn is director of the Center to Improve Care of the Dying at George Washington University and Harrold is medical director of a Pennsylvania hospice.) The handbook offers many sidebars, including "Words to Try" when speaking with a sick person: instead of saying, "Dad, you are going to be just fine," the authors suggest saying, "Dad, are there some things that worry you?" Proceeds from the sale of the book support Americans for Better Care of the Dying, a national charitable organization devoted to improving care for the last stage of life. --*Gail Hudson*

From Library Journal

Designed for caregivers as well as patients, this book combines insights and inspiration with practical information and sensible suggestions for coping with critical, debilitating illnesses and the attendant problems such as accepting a new lifestyle, controlling pain, getting help, deciding on medical treatment, and enduring a loss. The death of a child, sudden death as the result of an accident, and similarly atypical instances are discussed briefly. Throughout, there are poignant excerpts from literature and case descriptions. Appendixes list organizations and sources of further information or assistance. Constance Jones R.I.P.: The Complete Book of Death and Dying (HarperCollins, 1997), which includes statistics, varying cultural practices, and more information resources, covers the topic more comprehensively. Nevertheless, this handbook, edited by the director of the Center To Improve Care for the Dying (<http://www.gwu.edu/~cicd>), exudes a compassion and warmth that will appeal to individual readers. Margaret Norden, Marymount Univ. Lib., Arlington, VA
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From Kirkus Reviews

A clear guide and a steadying hand for those with a life-threatening illness: medical, emotional, spiritual and above all, practical help for day-to-day living. Lynn (director of the George Washington Medical School Center to Improve Care of the Dying) and Harrold (a fellow at the National Cancer Institute) have abundant experience and it shows here. They clarify and articulate the issues and concerns, physical and otherwise, that come with facing death. First and foremost, "If you have been pursuing all sorts of treatments and technology that are uncomfortable, how do you know when to let go of these and make different plans for how to spend the rest of your life?" From this starting point, the authors are able to help readers create their own approaches to a period of life when the duration and timing are unpredictable, but a singular opportunity exists for growth and finding peace. Lynn and Harrold go on to consider practicalities at length and in depth, from helping families make decisions as a unit to finding community support services, communicating with physicians, and controlling pain and other disturbing symptoms. When the end is in sight, the authors again first provide a focus: "How do you handle the urgent need to find meaning for yourself in what is soon to be

a completed life?" Then, practical help abounds: among the issues, plans that must be made ahead, decisions to forgo medical treatment, and hastening death. Lynn and Harrold's discussion of assisted suicide is a model of sensitive, knowledgeable medical care. Coping with the events near death, enduring loss, and help with some specific situations (loss of children among them) receive the same illuminating discussion. An up-to-date resource list rounds out this guide. An unflinching look at the painful tasks and opportunities for growth that accompany the end of life; coupled with invaluable help for completing them. -- *Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Darcie Hartman:

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Alice Navarro:

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