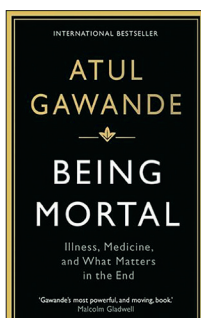


Out of Hours Books

Being Mortal. Illness, Medicine and What Matters in the End

Atul Gawande

Profile Books, 2015, PB, 304pp, £7.99,
978-1846685828



DYING WELL

Just a few generations ago, our unshielded ancestors were faced with mortality on a regular basis. A proportion succumbed at birth, and whoever made it through had a good chance that childhood, motherhood, or a plethora of other ordeals would mark their early demise. The living were intimately acquainted with death and the dying process; indeed my grandmother describes viewing the body of a dead relative at the tender age of seven. 'Being mortal' is synonymous with being human, and yet most of us are notoriously bad at planning for the inevitable.

In this profoundly moving book, Atul Gawande recounts his professional and personal encounters with age, death, and dying, from the young woman with cancer who is subjected to endless debilitating treatment in a futile pursuit for survival, to the experiences of his own family navigating his father's final years. This is a candid read, and an admirable account of Gawande's own philosophy, never shying away from the times he may have been mistaken.

As doctors it can be difficult to embrace death when we seek so often to defy it, but medical care in the dying period can be as essential for patients as any other kind of treatment. The story of one of Gawande's patients, a lady whose last weeks were made bearable by surgery to unblock her strangled bowel, is such an example — the operation proved to be just as life changing as any curative procedure.

In a provoking deconstruction of the options open to us in our final few years,

Gawande uses the stories of individuals to highlight the inadequacy of our current solutions; the retirement homes and hospices that dominate our perception of end-of-life care.

Such places, he argues, should be filled with additional life, citing the bedbound resident who began to speak when a pair of parakeets moved into his room, and the apartment block owner who made heroic efforts to house her elderly tenants so that they could continue to enjoy a margarita in their own living room. The message could perhaps be summarised as: the process of dying involves living, and every effort is required to ensure we do it justice.

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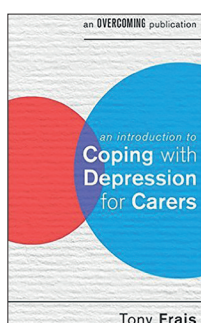
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An Introduction to Coping With Depression For Carers

Tony Fraiss

Little, Brown Book Group, 2015, PB, 96pp,
£4.99, 978-1472119339



INSIGHT AND SUPPORT FOR CARERS

Everyone likes short books. It's more important than most that this book doesn't appear overwhelming, as it's targeted at those who may be feeling overwhelmed by other parts of their life.

This book is a brief, but not insubstantial, guide to those who are looking after someone who has depression. The current book is updated and slightly expanded from a 2013 version, though this isn't mentioned in the book itself. There's also no information

about the author, but intriguingly, his other books are for children.

What is included is sensible advice on depression symptoms, how it affects people, and how carers can look after themselves. Navigating contact with GPs, psychologists, and psychiatrists is also covered, as is the sorts of treatments that work, and what to do when they don't. Throughout the book are comments from carers drawn from the published literature. That points to one of the strengths of this book: that the advice offered is based on published evidence.

None of the advice seems too complicated, and all of it seems achievable. It runs the risk of oversimplification however; for example:

'It is helpful if you can encourage the depressed person to talk about their feelings and emotions as early as possible.' (p27).

Well, yes, but easier said than done. There could also have been more discussion about dealing with coexisting medical conditions, common among those with depression. However, both of these would extend and complicate the book, making it less approachable, and so probably harder to use.

This book can be recommended as a practical read for those living with people with depression, and for registrars looking for practical advice to pass on. After all, everyone likes short books.

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