

FAITH & VALUES IN THE MEDIA

Valuable resource for end-of-life care

AT THE CLOSE OF DAY: A Person-Centered Guidebook on End-of-Life Care. By Lance L. Davis, M.D. MPH, and Albert H. Keller, D. Min. Self-published. 217 pages. \$18.95

This is a book of deep wisdom, told in simple, real-life terms. It addresses an issue of utmost importance to all of us: how to manage the dying process for patients and all who walk with them on that journey.

The authors bring experience, expertise and passion to their task of producing a guidebook "designed to be a professional consultation with a doctor and an ethicist."

Dr. Lance Davis has practiced emergency and family medicine in the Carolinas and, as a Naval Reserve physician, has served in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The Rev. Dr. Albert H. Keller has served as associate professor of ethics at the Medical University of South Carolina and as pastor of the Circular Congregational Church in Charleston for more than 30 years.

Written in conversational style, the book alternates between the two authors, who offer information, options and advice from their respective positions. Their goal is to enable terminally ill patients and their families to choose a well-managed death, as opposed to the chaos of a poorly managed one.

A recurring theme of the book

is an approach that the authors term the active management of dying, asserting that "death, if it is well-planned, can be a peaceful process." Addressing the medical and spiritual-emotional issues that accompany terminal illness and death, the authors identify five tools to serve as guideposts for patients and families.

The first five chapters of the book address these tools:

- ▶ Accept the reality of the situation.
- ▶ Identify the decisionmakers.
- ▶ Discuss the ultimate goals of care.
- ▶ Create an end-of-life care plan.
- ▶ Implement the care plan you created.

The book confronts, head on, the most pressing need of people confronted with impending death — of themselves or of a loved one: the need to move from fear, denial and despair to realistic hope.

Keller teaches a profoundly valuable lesson in understanding our very human process of avoiding death and how to transform that avoidance into a meaningful journey, through the painful parts to life-affirming acceptance and hope. He uses sound, well-stated reasoning coupled with real-life cases to lead readers through what is uncharted territory for most people. Davis adds value to the lesson from the medical perspective.

Building on that foundation, Davis and Keller address the many practical details that

people must be prepared to consider. They cover very thoroughly the issues relating to making health-care decisions for another person, including moral and ethical considerations.

Their discussion of the goals of care is particularly helpful. In view of the wide-ranging capabilities of modern medical technology, the temptation to continue aggressive treatment of a terminally ill patient past the point of effectiveness or benefit is very real. Only when the patient and/or family members have thoroughly discussed goals for the patient's care with the physician can there be any assurance that the patient's best interests are being pursued.

Operating on the premise that "just because we can doesn't mean we should," Davis and Keller offer positive guidance for determining goals of care. Especially useful are a graded list of medical interventions by Davis and a discussion of the myths of dying by both authors. The authors complete the "tool box" with simple suggestions for creating and implementing an end-of-life care plan.

Particularly impressive is the thoroughness with which the authors develop this guidebook. Recognizing that illness often creates significant financial issues for the patient and family, a chapter is written by a financial and insurance expert.

Other helpful subjects are some elements of specific advice for end-of-life care and

a valuable chapter on grieving, with input from both authors.

The book also addresses specific end-of-life issues pertaining to care in a nursing home, intensive-care unit and emergency department, as well as useful segments regarding organ donation and medications often used in terminal care.

Adding to its value as a guidebook are appendices offering an explanation of terms pertaining to end of life, sample orders to assist a physician caring for a terminally ill patient and a list of suggested readings.

Readers are also directed to a Web site the authors maintain (www.atcloseofday.com) that offers free access to living will and health care power of attorney forms for all 50 states.

Overall, the book promises to be extremely valuable to terminally ill patients, their families and the health care professionals caring for them.

The treatment of the subject could be improved, however, in two areas: Although the authors use lay language throughout, there are a few medical diagnosis terms that might need some interpretation or simple definition.

Also, giving some attention (perhaps in an appendix) to cultural differences that may impact end-of-life care would broaden the usefulness of the book.

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Mindfulness meditation may add meaning to life

BY TINA DANZE
The Dallas Morning News

Jon Kabat-Zinn, an internationally renowned teacher, author and researcher, is a leading authority on stress reduction using "mindfulness meditation."

Dr. Kabat-Zinn has been instrumental in trying to bring mindfulness meditation into mainstream

Q: What should one think about while meditating?

A: In my new book, there's a chapter called "Meditation: It's Not What You Think." What it is is paying attention to what's going on in your body and mind. Thinking will be inevitable. You're not trying to suppress your thoughts — that's one of the big misconceptions

