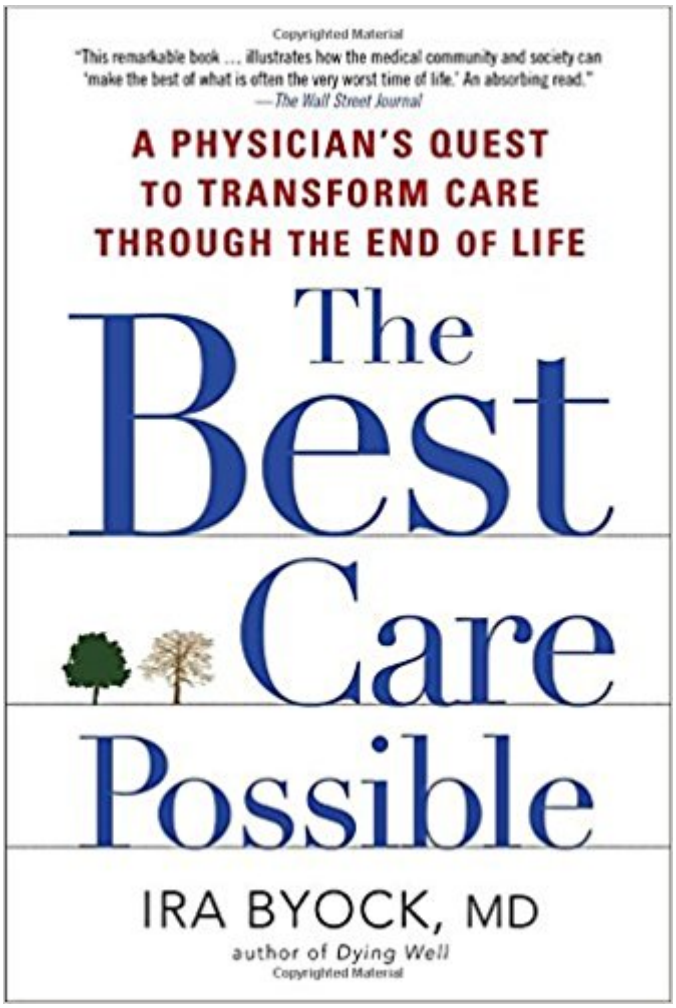
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The Best Care Possible: A Physician's Quest To Transform Care Through The End Of Life



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Synopsis

A doctor on the front lines of hospital care illuminates one of the most important and controversial social issues of our time. It is harder to die in this country than ever before. Though the vast majority of Americans would prefer to die at homeÃ¢â ¬â •which hospice care providesÃ¢â ¬â •many of us spend our last days fearful and in pain in a healthcare system ruled by high-tech procedures and a philosophy to Ã¢â ¬Å“fight disease and illness at all cost.Ã¢â ¬Â• Dr. Ira Byock, one of the foremost palliative-care physicians in the country, argues that how we die represents a national crisis today. To ensure the best possible elder care, Dr. Byock explains we must not only remake our healthcare system but also move beyond our cultural aversion to thinking about death. The Best Care Possible is a compelling meditation on medicine and ethics told through page-turning life-or-death medical drama. It has the power to lead a new national conversation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ã¢â ¬Å“There is no palliative care physician for whom I have more respect and admiration than Ira Byock. In this strikingly important book, Byock presents an agenda for end-of-life care that should serve as an ideal template on which to build our best hopes for the final days of those we love and ourselvesÃ¢â ¬â •and a corrective for our society.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Sherwin B. Nuland, MD, Yale Interdisciplinary Center for Bioethics and author of How We Die "With elegance, compassion, and energy, Ira Byock shows us how to get the best end of life care. He is a great storyteller and a brilliant analyst of health care in America. This is the book to read or give, if you are facing this hard

situation. Nobody gets out of this life alive, but Byock shows us how to do it elegantly and well." Ã¢â ¬â •Jane Isay, author of Walking on Eggshells "This is an extraordinary and wise book on how dying people can be cared for. Written by a master clinician, a man of great compassion, Ira Byock has a vision of health care that is brilliant and kind." Ã¢â ¬â •Roshi Joan Halifax, Abbot, Upaya Zen Center, Sante Fe, author of Being with Dying "In a world in which politics are polarized and ethical discussions often descend into a food fight, Ira Byock is that rare doctor: a humane guide leading us with honesty and compassion through complex stories about living and dying well. He's a real-life rebuke to those who think palliative doctors are "death panels" and a mentor to every medical student inevitably faced with mortality. This is must reading for everyone trying to make humane decisions in a high tech world." Ã¢â ¬â •Ellen Goodman, longtime syndicated columnist for The Boston GlobeÃ¢â ¬Å“At a time when a long life can become a curse as readily as a blessing, this lucid and compassionate book points the way to more humane treatment of a lifeÃ¢â ¬â„¢s last days.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Rabbi Harold Kushner, author of When Bad Things Happen to Good PeopleÃ¢â ¬Å“The baby boom generation has transformed every stage of live weÃ¢â ¬â„¢ve touched. WeÃ¢â ¬â„¢re now transforming the dying process. And Dr. Byock is leading the wayÃ¢â ¬Â¦ brilliantly!Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Christiane Northrup, MD, ob/gyn and author of the New York Times bestselling WomenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Bodies, WomenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Wisdom and The Wisdom of Menopause "A magnificent, moving, and deeply important work. Ira Byock is a trailblazer whose lifeÃ¢â ¬â„¢s work has forever changed the way we view dying in this country. But thereÃ¢â ¬â„¢s much more to be done. The Best Care Possible is ByockÃ¢â ¬â„¢s urgent and passionate call to action for the nation. This book is a must-read for anyone who thinks thereÃ¢â ¬â„¢s even a possibility that they someday might die.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Dave Isay, founder of StoryCorps, author-editor of Listening Is an Act of Love Ã¢â ¬Å“In a world of sound bites, end-of-life concerns are framed politically with emotionally charged rhetoric. Above the clamor, Dr. Byock writes a compelling case for consistent, compassionate, and enduring palliative care for all people as they reach the winter of their lives. Through vignettes he outlines the challenges for the patient, the caregivers, and the medical community, and ably advocates a revolution of care for the end of life. This is a revolution sorely needed and worth fighting for.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Pastor Robert Fleischmann, National Director, Christian Life Resources Ã¢â ¬Å“Dr. Byock, one of the countryÃ¢â ¬â„¢s leading experts in palliative care, shares his wisdom and insights on how to get the best care possible when we are confronted with a potentially life-limiting illness. When my own mother was seriously ill, IraÃ¢â ¬â„¢s words helped our family make the right choices and make sure she got the care she wanted Ã¢â ¬â œ and no more Ã¢â ¬â œ during her last months. His

words can help you.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Elliott S. Fisher, MD, MPH, Director of Population Health and Policy, The Dartmouth Institute Ã¢â ¬Å“In The Best Care Possible, Ira Byock tells us why we need to move beyond medicineÃ¢â ¬â„¢s fixation on conquering death to a vision of end-of-life care focused on the quality of the patientÃ¢â ¬â„¢s experience. This is a beautifully written, highly personal account that makes real the struggle of patients and families to escape the Ã¢â ¬Å“high-techÃ¢â ¬Â•, more is better imperative that dominates the American way of death. It provides compelling examples of how the physician, committed to reform, can help patients achieve the care they want and need. But Byock goes further: he makes the case that professional reform is only part of the solution; overcoming the medicalization of death will require the mobilization of the wider community in the support of the dying (and those with chronic illness).Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Jack Wennberg, MD author of Tracking Medicine: a ResearcherÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Quest to Understand Health Care Ã¢â ¬Å“This is a profoundly truthful book. Ira Byock uses powerful stories about real people to explain the complications, nuances and often absurdity of advanced illness in 21st century America. He shows how courage, shared decisions, wise doctors and nurses and palliative care can make the difference. Above all, he calls for a cultural transformation, so we can deal with the end of life as individuals, families and society. Who should read it? All of us who are mortal.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Bill Novelli, Professor, Georgetown University and co-chair, the Coalition to Transform Advanced Care (and former CEO, AARP) Ã¢â ¬Å“Dr. Byock lets the stories of patients, families, and medical colleagues open windows into the heart of the issues. He leads the reader captivatingly from story to story to see and feel what the best care through the end of life can be and deftly invites our nation to envision the best care for our culturally diverse society and cultures. Dr. Byock captures the fundamental human impulse to care lovingly for one another at the most sacred and privileged moments of our livesÃ¢â ¬Â¦now and through the end of life.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •David Lichter, D.Min., Executive Director, National Association of Catholic Chaplains Ã¢â ¬Å“Dr. ByockÃ¢â ¬â„¢s book rejuvenates me. In allowing us the special privilege of entering the sacred space of their final journey, people teach us precious lessons about ourselves. Dr. Byock has a gift of sharing the lessons heÃ¢â ¬â„¢s learned in a most readable narrative marked by compassion, love of life, and lucidity.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Rabbi Bunny Freedman, Founding Director of Jewish Hospice & Chaplaincy Network

Ira Byock, M.D., is director of Palliative Medicine at Dartmouth- Hitchcock Medical Center and a professor at Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth. He lives in Enfield, New Hampshire.

This book is not intended for everyone. Just for those of us with an ailing loved one, or a loved one who who is dying. Or those of us who may at some time have an ailing loved one, or a loved one who may die. Or those of us who may at some time ourselves be ailing or dying. Dr Byock transforms the discussion of how we live our final days from a political hot potato to a rational, personal and heartfelt fact of life. As a physician, I am keenly aware of the miraculous medical tools that we as Americans are fortunate to have available to us. I am equally aware, however how the inappropriate use of these tools can contradict our ultimate responsibility as physicians to "above all do no harm". More importantly, as the son of one of the patients whose journey through critical illness and hospice care is chronicled in The Best Care Possible, I have witnessed and experienced how an informed and caring medical team can positively effect not only the patient, but those who love her as well. Let the publication of this book awaken us all to the need for a national discussion, in a sane and rational way, of the need of advanced directives, and an assessment of how we choose to spend our final days. Sanford E Glikin, MD

I work with Dr. Byock and can tell you every patient who is facing cancer or any critical health crisis should be cared for by him and his team. As a volunteer in his Palliative Care Program, I see first hand his goals of not only good care and pain management, but his fervent wish that each patient be treated with the dignity and grace they deserve in what might be their last days. He has assembled an amazing team to make sure his goal is achieved, from nurses, doctors, social workers, chaplains and us, the volunteers who can make a difference just because we can take extra time and spend it with the patients and families.If I had the power, I would give him the Nobel Peace prize for the humanity he shows every patients and family and they make some very difficult decisions with each patient and they prepare for what is so often the approaching end of life. An extremely well written book which will show what I am referring to regarding Dr. Byock being the model for every Doctor leading a Palliative team.

This book helped me clarify my thinking about end-of-life care and the conversations families need to have before it is too late. Neglecting to carefully make and share specific choices risks subjecting the dying person to multiple, futile resuscitations and prolonged, hopeless lingering before the death finally, inevitably occurs.This book does not argue for euthanasia or assisted suicide. As the author makes clear, these two controversial issues distract our attention from the values and concerns we share about living a good life that ends with a dignified, gentle death. Whatever your position on those topics (the author calls himself ’pro-life’ and explains why he does not agree with physicians

practising euthanasia or assisted suicide) you will find yourself sharing many of the author's concerns and values on the vital topic of end-of-life care.

It is impossible for a layman to comment on the professional content of this book, but the narrative treatment of real life case histories makes it a highly emotional read, considering that America is a death defying culture served by doctors who will never give up unless forced to do so. Perhaps it is humanly impossible to cope ahead for the decisions to be made in end of life care, but this is certainly food for thought and advanced planning. Many people may not have the stomach for it, but that is no excuse for avoidance as evidenced by the small number of reviews even after several years in publication. Dr. Byock covers the many medical issues in dying from the inside out and spends considerable time describing a better way than the present dismal profit driven system regulated by government controls. I wish he had included more on the catastrophic cost of treatments and followed up his case discussions to the end of life rather than exiting when his role was completed...but then most doctors are never around at the time of death. They leave that up to nurses. He mentions the nurses, chaplains and social workers on the hospice teams but he never really describes their roles. He claims that humans naturally want to be care givers in a community with dying elders, but the fact is this society is much too self centered and families too dispersed for the social integration our ancestors enjoyed. He concludes that illness, death, and grief are difficult, turbulent, and normal stages of life. Since we cannot change it best to learn how to live with it. Doctors never like to give up hope so long as there is another treatment to try, and somebody to pay for it. We expect them to extend life and not to end it. But many times they only extend suffering instead. Do not expect Hollywood to make a movie out of this one.

Ira Byock, MD has written another gem of a book. If you don't understand the power of palliative care to foster quality life, comfort at the end of life, and the prospect of gentle death, this book will illuminate you. Filled with patient stories that show how addressing death and working together to achieve a peaceful end of life is possible and can create healing and closure.The end of the book is a strong call to transform the way we die in America. The author feels that "How we die is already a public health crisis, and care of people through the end of life is poised to become a generation-long social catastrophe." He further states that "the way many Americans die remains a national disgrace."Dr. Byock writes with compassion and purpose. If you are willing to face the inevitable fact that you will one day die and that others might depend on you to make choices and decisions for them, this book is worth your time. It might even spark your desire to influence social change. Dr.

Byock states that "For the magnitude of change that is needed to occur, social activism is necessary." Death unites us all.How do you want to die and do you deserve "The Best Care Possible"?

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