



TITLE INFORMATION

FAREWELL

Vital End-of-Life Questions with Candid Answers from a Leading Palliative and Hospice Physician
Edward T. Creagan and Sandra Wendel

BOOK REVIEW

With some forethought and deliberation, life's darkest passage can be made less agonizing and more graceful, according to this illuminating guide.

Mayo Clinic oncology professor Creagan draws on his decades of experience to address common issues faced by family members and caregivers in the palliative treatment of dying patients. Much of the book covers the physical symptoms and discomfort patients experience—including pain, sleeplessness, constipation, mental disorientation, and drowsiness—and the use of drugs, from painkillers like morphine to antidepressants to improve mood, in addition to some novel low-tech tricks (a low-speed fan blowing on a patient's face, he notes, can relieve shortness of breath). The author also cautions readers about heroic medical intervention ("the higher the cost for care, the lower the quality of life for the patient and the lower the quality of death during the final weeks of life") and warns about the minefield of uninsured costs that can bankrupt a family. He gives tips on how loved ones should interact with the patient (try asking about old times or a favorite pet) and how they should not (don't dredge up old feuds or prattle on about current events) and emphasizes the necessity of making a clear will to prevent ugly fights over inheritances from erupting among family members at the deathbed. (He also tackles the heartbreaking decisions that can arise, such as the question of when the plug should be pulled on a patient on life support.) Creagan's treatment of his fraught subject mixes down-to-earth practicalities with philosophical explorations, all conveyed in lucid, sympathetic, and evocative prose: "At the end of someone's life, families look back and may not remember the skilled surgeon or the radiologist, but they certainly remember the nurse who provided a warm blanket or the physical therapist who performed a daily foot massage." Readers facing the anxiety of loss will find a reassuring roadmap here.

An insightful primer on a dying with dignity, full of plainspoken wisdom.

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