



Death:OK (Let's Talk About It) Annotated Bibliography

The best of the newer books on death and dying:

Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters at the End, by Atul Gawande, 2014, 282pp. Gawande, a practicing and teaching surgeon, and an award-winning medical writer argues for conscious conversations about end of life care -- what does the patient want, fear, need in this final stage of life. Excellent, well written, thoughtful and very human approach to what we need, and what the medical profession needs to do and understand in this final phase.

The Conversation: A Revolutionary Plan for End-of-Life Care, by Angelo E. Volandes, 2015, 240 pp. Dr. Volandes' telling of seven deaths illustrates and illuminates how and why we fail the dying and their families, and what we can all do to make this an easier, more patient- and family-centered passage.

Curing Medicare: One Doctor's View of How Our Health Care System is Failing the Elderly and How to Fix It, by Andy Lazis, 2014, 290 pp. From a geriatric specialist who wants desperately to care for his elderly patients with compassion and kindness, but finds himself thwarted at every turn by an overzealous medical culture, irrational regulations, and perverse Medicare payments that too often make sending patients to hospital the easiest option.

Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant [A Memoir], by Roz Chast, 2014, 228 pp. In this delightfully honest, very readable graphic novel, Chast spans the last several years of her parents lives, bringing her signature wit and humor to the topic of aging parents. Told through four-color cartoons, family photos, and documents, and a narrative as full of laughs as it is with tears, Chast's memoir is both comfort and comic relief for anyone experiencing the life-altering loss of elderly parents. Many how-to and how-not-to insights into how to navigate this time of life.

Knocking on Heaven's Door: The Path to a Better Way of Death, by Katy Butler, 2014, 352pp. This beautiful, intensely personal and highly readable book by acclaimed science writer Katy Butler recounts the physical travails and medical interventions that accompany her elderly father's downward spiral at the end of life and the toll it takes on her and her mother. With compassion and integrity and deeply engaging writing, Butler looks at the inevitable strain on caregivers and family members, considers the possibilities of the untapped palliative care, and ponders the closely allied arenas of prolonging death/saving a life.

There are so many! Here are a few other really good books on the subject:

Die Wise, A Manifesto for Sanity and Soul, by Stephen Jenkinson, 2015, 368pp.

After two decades of experience in palliative care, Stephen Jenkinson came to a stunning conclusion: as a culture and a species, we are utterly unprepared to embrace death and the grief that comes with it. As a result, we deny a fundamental part of our own lives. With lyrical prose and deep wisdom, Jenkinson rescues death from the margins and places it in the center of the page, asking readers to behold it in all its painful beauty.

How We Die: Reflections on Life's Final Chapter, by Sherwin B. Nuland, 1994, with a 2010 coda, 296pp. Excellent coverage of the physical process of dying. While the medical world has changed since it was first published, bodies haven't much, and many of the same problems exist; the 2010 coda brings it more up to date. Nuland is an excellent writer.

Dying the Right Way: A System of Caregiving & Planning for Families, Janice Louise Long, 2010, 310pp. A guidebook on how to help a loved one with the many details and issues surrounding end-of-life care. Narrative provides insights, very readable.

Grave Matters: A Journey Through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial, by Mark Harris, 2008, 224pp. Although slightly dated, it's still an extremely insightful and useful book. In the face of the billion-dollar-a-year funeral industry, former environmental columnist Harris provides details and information on the full spectrum of burial options, although he advocates green burial. Including specifics about probable costs, approaches, availability and more, this well-organized resource provides useful overview for anyone considering the disposition of a loved one.

Final Rights: Reclaiming the American Way of Death, by Lisa Carlson and Joshua Slocum, 2011, 511pp. The two most prominent leaders of the funeral-related consumer protection movement are the authors of this book: Joshua Slocum, executive director of Funeral Consumers Alliance, and Lisa Carlson, executive director of Funeral Ethics Organization. Here they expose wrongdoings, inform consumers of their rights, and propose legal reforms. It includes state-by-state summaries of laws, regulations, services, and consumer concerns.