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Two Book Reviews

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Help Me to Heal: A Practical Guide for Patients, Visitors, and Caregivers

By Bernie Siegel, MD and Yosaif August • Hay House, Inc., Carlsbad CA • \$19.95

Readers of this book will find that it is what its title says it is – a practical guide for healing. Part I is written for patients who are already in, or planning to be in, the hospital. Its outline of practical suggestions for both preventing errors and promoting healing begins with the suggestion that patients form healing teams composed of family and friends who can help – in the hospital and, as necessary, at home. It's important to understand, the authors say, that we all need help from time to time.

Part II is directed to the non-professional caregivers that make up the healing team and to visitors. The value of its guide to patient advocates lies not only in the clarity of its tips, but also in its approach to advocacy. That is, it shows caregivers how to support and promote the patient's wishes while empowering patients to self-advocate. At the same time, it shows caregivers how to avoid becoming depleted or drained by the experience. For those who simply want to offer support and encouragement by visiting – it shows how to make those visits promote healing, rather than hinder it. The book then concludes, in Part III, with more tips for healing encounters and lists of resources.

As helpful as the practical tips are, what makes this book noteworthy, is that it introduces the public to concepts that have long been advocated by physicians, medical ethicists, and other professionals who work to bring about change in doctor-patient communication and healthcare practices. For instance, the authors state that being a 'good patient' *does not* promote healing! This is based on the Latin derivation of the word 'patient' which is to 'suffer' or 'bear' as in to bear annoyance or pain without complaint. But the authors tell us not to be patient or silent. Instead, they urge patients to take responsibility for their lives and not be "submissive sufferers." In doing so, however, they stress the importance of communicating in ways that respect the dignity and sensitivities of *all* others. To say we should be assertive and question authority, they point out, does not mean we should be adversarial.

A second concept is the need to distinguish healing from curing. Healing, the authors say, refers to the person as a whole, whereas curing refers to the physical body. Physical diseases cannot always be cured but, they claim, we can always heal ourselves. What is healing? To this they would reply that healing is a process that leads us to "become whole" and to do that we "must attain peace of mind." While they acknowledge that finding peace of mind is more easily said than done, they suggest that one positive aspect

of being in the hospital is the time that becomes available to work towards that goal. With the practical tips provided here, achieving peace of mind just might be within reach. (See, also, *Questions*, reviewed below.)

Help Me to Heal is easy to read, in large part because of its tone. Throughout it the authors share stories – those of their own and others’ – and speak to us as if we were having face-to-face conversations with them. In this instance, we’ll all be the better for listening.□

This book may be purchased through Benedictine Hospital (call 845-338-2500 x 4453). A portion of the proceeds from books purchased through them will be donated to their oncology support program. You can also contact the publisher at www.hayhouse.com or 1-800-654-5126.

Questions for Quiet Times

By Dillon Woods • Windermere Publications, Los Angeles CA • \$12.95

Two statements, in Dillon Woods’ introduction to his book, say it all: *Taking time to reflect on our life can be a healing and strengthening experience; and Science is clearly adding years to our life[sic], but now we must add life to our years.*

This book, which is not a book as much as it is a journaling workbook, can help patients follow advice to find peace of mind and, through that process, become whole. Are you skeptical? After all, writing thoughts down may be one helpful way to jumpstart the process, but blank pages in a book often do little to spark a “blank” mind. Where would you begin? Woods realizes this, however, and helps the journalist focus by providing “assignments” (List closest friends or family members, describe what you have done with them, how you feel about each...) and questions (What parts of your life do you feel are in control and what parts need more control?).

Because the search for peace of mind is as individual as the person seeking it, Woods reminds us that we do not have to respond to every assignment or question in this book. Rather, we should respond to those that interest us and skip the ones that don’t. In this way, he says, we will each beat paths to our individual unconscious. This is one way those of us on this quest can begin to explore – get to know and like – ourselves. And that is an important step in finding peace of mind.

We would also do well to remember, Woods advises, that patients are not the only ones who can benefit thus from finding peace of mind. Anyone experiencing one of life’s many transitions can gain from the explorations facilitated by this book. His other suggestion that this be a regularly repeated process is also well taken. Life changes. So do we. We should keep in touch.□

For purchasing information contact the publishers at www.livingwithquality.org or 1-310-358-6043.

Judith A. Greenfield is contributing editor of the *Healthcare Communication Review* and President of the Healthcare Communication Project, Inc.

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