

*Handbook for Mortals: Guidance For People Facing Serious Illness 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*

Joanne Lynn, Janice Lynn Schuster, Joan Harrold  
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*Reviewed by Ocala freelance writer, Evelyn B. Kelly, PhD*

Authors Joanne Lynn, Janice Schuster and Joan Harrold have updated their popular guide *Handbook for Mortals: Guidance for People Facing Serious Illness*. The guide is written for those who wish to approach the final years with greater expectations and awareness and who seek to make the end of life a period for reflection. The lead author, Dr. Lynn, was one of the first hospice physicians in the United States and contributor to research and policy on end-of-life issues.

A prevailing thesis of the book is that modern technology has changed both the way we live and the way we die; however, most people try to deny facing the issues of death and come unprepared to make decisions about death. The authors address this problem with positive and encouraging statements from different perspectives. The book is intended for people living with serious illness, their relatives and friends.

How to live with serious illness, death and dying permeates each chapter. Tips on talking with a sick person are featured. For example, instead of saying: “Dad, you’re going to be just fine,” try this instead: “Dad, are there some things that worry you. It must be hard to come to come terms with all this.” Also, instead of saying, “Don’t talk like that! You can beat this,” say: “We will always be here for you.”

From the onset of the illness to the nitty-gritty of making decisions about final moments, the authors address issues with empathy and compassion. Chapters include such topics as talking to your doctor, planning for making choices, dealing with the healthcare system, taking care of the caregiver, and facing how death affects dying persons, their families, and friends. In addition to people who have long illness, chapters also address dying of children, sudden death and enduring loss.

How to communicate and talk about death and dying are mainstays of this book. For example, in our society it is more common to hear words like “is gone,” “was lost,” “passed,” or “expired,” than he “died.” Talking to the doctor is even more difficult. The authors guide the reader to consider questions that are worth asking and suggestions for making the most out of each visit to the doctor.

A strong feature of the book is the section on resources that show how to go about planning, making advance directives, and other end-of-life decisions, such as contacting Area Agencies of Aging and hospice. Personal anecdotes of how real people have coped help the reader gain perspective and humanize the book. Also, the authors use pertinent passages from literary giants such as Emily Dickinson. This book is one that should be in the personal library of all individuals. It is exactly as the title implies a realistic handbook for mortals, which gives both physical advice and spiritual encouragement.