

Terminal Illness: Caring for yourself and others

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Pastoral Outreach Series, Redemptorist Publications, 2018

ISBN 978 – 0 – 85231 – 521 – 7 £4.95

What a wonderful, straight-forward and helpful little book. In fifty-three pages, everything is covered in clear language. Terminal illness is defined and the authors encourage us to use instead a better term: life-limiting condition, which allows both the person affected and those caring for them an opportunity to think about still being alive rather than just being soon-to-die. This is important because no matter how short the time left, there are things to do and say – by everyone involved – and this can only happen when there is honesty and openness. The authors are practitioners in end of life, palliative and older people care based in the south-west of England. If the care in other parts of the country is as good and comprehensive as they suggest it can be, the prospects for the dying and the bereaved are better than I thought. The Introduction to the book reminds us, if we need reminding, that '... in recent times, illness and death have become removed from normal family life and medicalised. Relatively few people under the age of sixty have witnessed death'. It goes on to deal with what happens when a person is given the news of a life-limiting condition and the possibilities open to them; the people and resources which (mostly) are available through health and social services, and others; the natural reactions of both person affected and carers and family, including denial and anger; and the final days before dying and the aftermath for family and friends. There is a brilliant short section headed: What is dying like? It describes what professionals see every day but which can be hidden away from spouses, children, or friends by fear of the unknown or unwanted. And the answer? 'In reality, and for the most part, the dying process is a gradual, gentle and peaceful process, whereby a person deteriorates over a period of hours or a short number of days'. There are sections on making practical preparations and on indicating firm wishes about medical interventions – some more information on the variety of ways of making wishes clear would have been a useful addition, possibly as an Appendix. There are delightful personal stories to lighten the reader's journey and suggestions for prayers or reflections. People with no allegiance to a religious faith will find this book as acceptable and useful as those with belief in God or close connections to faith communities. It will be sad if those who need to read this book only come across it when their life is nearly ended or by those caring for them when they are lately dead. *Christians on Ageing* is revising its own contributions in print and on its website to the subject of dying and death. It can find no better standard to follow than this excellent publication.