

Book Review

Minding the Future: Approaching Aging with a Plan

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Aging with a Plan, Second Edition: How a Little Thought Today Can Vastly Improve Your Tomorrow by Sharona Hoffman, JD, LL.M, SJD, First Hill Books, London, United Kingdom, 2022, 220 pp.

Keywords: Aging, dementia, life planning, caregiving

A researcher or expert in fields allied with Gerontology or degenerative dementias may look askance at an important new book, written by a law professor at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, which highlights the many facets of aging that impact your life, your caregiving, and provides extensive qualitative information based on previous quantitative research, making for “successful aging”. However, this book is a handy guide for family members new to the intricate planning process and new challenges associated with aging, illness, and dependency in themselves or loved ones. In simple language and engaging personal experiences, Professor Hoffman reviews important topics relating to money matters, benefits of community living, essential legal planning, driving and care planning, and end of life issues. As such, she expounds and sheds light on the truism that “it is better to think about the future and do nothing now, than never having thought about it”. Retirement and aging consume a large part of the latter portion of one’s life, and not planning is definitely not in one’s general best interests when it comes to new challenges such as elder law, taking the keys from a loved one with dementia, and navigating social safety net programs.

In a poignant introduction, Professor Hoffman explores her own experiences in caregiving for her mother, father, and husband, leading to authoring this book “in order to find answers to the many questions

and anxieties...about growing old without an obvious source of informal caregiving”. As such, “the book strives to develop sound approaches to building sustainable social, medical, and financial support mechanisms that can increase the likelihood of a good quality of life throughout the aging process.” Furthermore, Professor Hoffman writes “planning for your later years entails not only taking concrete steps, such as writing a will and an advance directive, but also learning about the problems that the elderly encounter, such as obstacles to effective medical care and driving challenges. Learning about these matters will not only help you think through how you might address them when your time comes but will also empower you to help aging loved ones in the more immediate future.”

As a clinician with over thirty years of experience working with patients and their loved ones in neurodegenerative disorders, and personal experience in front-line caregiving for a parent, I feel this excellent book lays out the important issues in an orderly manner and gives sound and thorough advice, moving beyond truisms and platitudes about an issue that evinces copious ambivalence in large segments of our society. It complements well with other classics in this area such as “The Thirty six Hour Day”, and will be a valuable resource for both clinicians and ancillary providers and those new to the caregiving experience. As a colleague once commented,

“Caregiving is an occupation for which you received no training, and which you can’t easily quit”. Aging with a plan lays out the roadmap, in an environment at once both threatening in its complexity and dear to our hearts.

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