

Preparing for A Better End: Expert Lessons on Death and Dying for You and Your Loved Ones

Review by Theresa M. van der Vlugt, MD

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Preparing for a Better End: Expert Lessons on Death and Dying for You and Your Loved Ones, published in 2020, is the second publication from Dan Morhaim, MD, on the topic of end-of-life decisionmaking. It follows his first book, *The Better End*, published in 2011. Morhaim says, "My motivation for writing the book was my experience as an ER doctor. Seeing what happens to patients who do not have advance directives was disturbing. Too often the medical team was delivering care that wasn't what the patient needed or likely wanted."¹ What practicing emergency physician has not been in exactly the same situation? Preparing for A Better End (PfaBE) bills itself as a practical guidebook that is "organized as a roadmap that people should follow when they plan end-of-life care..."² It is full of stories from Dr. Morhaim's 40 years of clinical emergency department experience and more than 20 years as a Maryland state legislator, and he is aided by Shelley Morhaim, a movie director and therapeutic music practitioner who has worked with hospice patients. Glowing reviews for this book abound everywhere that it is sold.

While PfaBE spends a fair amount of time trying to convince the reader that advance directives, living wills, and physician orders for life-sustaining treatment (POLSTs) are a good idea (which, I suspect, is preaching to the choir for most emergency physicians), it goes much further to lay out particulars about how to achieve these. Entire chapters are devoted to clear, careful lay-language explanations of POLSTs, advance directives, durable powers of attorney for health care decisions, the similarities and differences between palliative care and hospice, and assisted dying as well as the various legislative differences regarding these topics in different states. He discusses the financial, legislative, and other difficulties of dementia at the end of life, and his book has chapters on end-of-life pharmaceuticals and organ and body donation. In his "No Job Is Complete Until

the Paperwork is Done: Making It Legal" chapter, he specifically lists several websites that will help people set up advance directives for free. Throughout, Morhaim shares his decades of personal experience both researching and trying to legislate end-of-life care topics and specifically discusses the various challenges that keep many people from setting up these vital documents or even considering how they would like the end of their lives to go.

This would be an excellent book for an emergency physician to buy for any friends or family members who love to hear "true stories of the emergency department" and who might also need to think about getting advance directives. Who is not in that position? The quip "none of us is getting out of here alive" is as true as it is variably attributed. If your parents or in-laws are tired of you badgering them to get an advance directive or a POLST, get them this book! The real-life stories are engaging, and Dr. Morhaim's first-person style and personal comments make him seem like an immediate friend. PfaBE is eminently readable and manages to discuss an almost universally frightening topic in a nonfrightening way while providing practical strategies and step-by-step processes to try to ensure a better end-of-life experience for all. The 272-page, 9- by 6-inch hardback is nicely bound, with a truly beautiful watercolor illustration on the jacket.

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REFERENCES

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2. Morhaim D, Morhaim S. *Preparing for a Better End: Expert Lessons on Death and Dying for You and Your Loved Ones*. Johns Hopkins University Press; 2020. book jacket.

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