

The Gift of Caring: Saving Our Parents from the Perils of Modern Healthcare

By Marcy Cottrell Houle M.S., Elizabeth Eckstrom M.D. M.P.H., Jennie Chin Hansen

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In a powerful blending of memoir and practical strategies from a medical doctor's perspective, *The Gift of Caring: Saving Our Parents – and ourselves - from the Perils of Modern Healthcare* reveals the hidden side of modern healthcare practices for aging Americans. This ground-breaking book, co-written by award-winning author Marcy Houle and nationally-recognized geriatrician and public health advocate, Elizabeth Eckstrom MD MPH, sheds new light on aging by showing it from twin perspectives: the story of a daughter desperately seeking help for the parents she loves, and a geriatrician who offers life-changing strategies that can protect our loved ones and ourselves.

Today, for many older adults, the medical delivery system is confusing, fragmented, and ill-equipped to provide comprehensive, person-centered care. Under our current healthcare model, thousands of aging persons face unnecessary suffering, hospitalizations and nursing home stays, and even preventable death.

Seniors and families often feel powerless as they travel this sad journey. Not having knowledge of aging's changes, they resign themselves to believing there is nothing anyone can do to help, while some health care professionals simply write off symptoms seniors endure as "just old age."

But as Marcy Houle discovered in caring for her parents, many of the problems often are not "just old age." Further, the real issue is *not* that the answers to ease suffering don't exist. Rather, what we need to know is generally not available to the general public. Even more concerning, many health care professionals have had little or no training in the care of older adults.

The Gift of Caring hopes to change that. It is written to give empowerment to all older adults, family members, and health care professionals, by sharing much needed knowledge and practical strategies. *The Gift of Caring* shows the best ways to advocate for our parent's health care … and our own … by giving us the tools we need to insist upon the better way.

Your parents and you deserve the best healthcare as you age- But there are so many reasons why that’s not happening.You can change that.

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Editorial Review

Review
. .. .Eckstrom comes across as knowledgeable, clear and compassionate — the provider everyone's mother should have. Yet few of us will find someone similarly informed. .. .In fact, this is a book for everyone — if not this moment, then eventually. It will be a book to keep handy when the elderly in your life become frail; and beyond that, when you yourself begin to forget things and wonder if it's the onset of dementia or when the pill bottles begin to gather by the side of your bed. Reading this just might be the best preventative medicine you can find. (*The Oregonian*)

This is a remarkable book. The story of Marcy Houle's family's discovery of their father having dementia reads like a novel. So many of the reactions a family can experience during this journey are portrayed in a caring but honest light. Houle's willingness to describe the struggles to accept the diagnosis and help her parents adjust serves as a model for other families facing this challenge. Hers is not a story just of struggle, but one also suffused with love and meaning. Dr. Eckstrom's chapters are very helpful—brief, but written in clear, understandable language, and very accurate. Hearing her approach to patients with dementia will enable readers to know what to look for in a caring and competent physician. (Kenneth Brummel-Smith, MD, Charlotte Edwards Maguire Professor and chair, department of geriatrics, Florida State University College of Medicine)

Houle's story will resonate emotionally with anyone who has cared for a parent or older relative. It also offers a practical guide for readers who are care-giving now and who want to give their loved ones the gift of good care.- SeniorAdvisor.com (*Senior Advisor*)

Informative, insightful, and clear, *The Gift of Caring* provides a moving exploration of what growing old means and how we as children, friends, and neighbors should respond. It provides extremely practical advice which serves as a wonderful roadmap to a better way of caring for older adults in America. I cannot recommend it highly enough. (Rachelle Bernacki, MD, MS, director of quality initiatives, Adult Palliative Care, DFCI)

With the growth of the elderly population, particularly those over eighty-five years of age, there is a tremendous need for resources like *The Gift of Caring*. There is so much to be learned from others who have traveled this road. (Dr. David B. Reuben, chief of Geriatric Medicine, UCLA; past president of the American Geriatric Society; past chair of the board of directors of the American Board of Internal Medicine)

'This is a book for everyone- if not this moment, then eventually. It will be a book to keep handy when the elderly in your life become frail; and beyond that, when you yourself begin to forget things and wonder if it's the onset of dementia or when the pill bottles begin to gather. Reading this just might be the best preventive medicine you can find. ' (*The Oregonian*)

"Must Have Book for Caregivers. .. .This book has a really interesting approach. Marcy Cottrell Houle – a professional writer – writes a memoir about caring for her Dad with Alzheimers and her frail mother. The story is interspersed with expert advice from Dr. Eckstrom that the author wishes she had known about avoiding pitfalls in our modern healthcare system. It's new and definitely will serve you well." – Anne Tumlinson (*Daughterhood.org*)

About the Author

Marcy Cottrell Houle, MS, is a biologist and award-winning author. Her book *Wings for My Flight* won the prestigious Christopher Medal and *The Prairie Keepers* was a New York Times Notable Book and a Booklist Editor's Choice. She has published articles in the *New York Times*, *Reader's Digest*, and *Nature Conservancy Magazine*, and has been featured on NPR and national television programs and in periodical reviews. She lives in Portland, Oregon.

Elizabeth Eckstrom, MD, MPH, is director of geriatrics in the Division of General Internal Medicine and Geriatrics at Oregon Health and Sciences University (OHSU) and cofounder of the OHSU Healthy Aging Alliance. She has received many honors and recognition for her innovative work. In addition, Dr. Eckstrom is a sought-after national speaker and the author of numerous articles on geriatrics. She lives in Portland, Oregon.

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