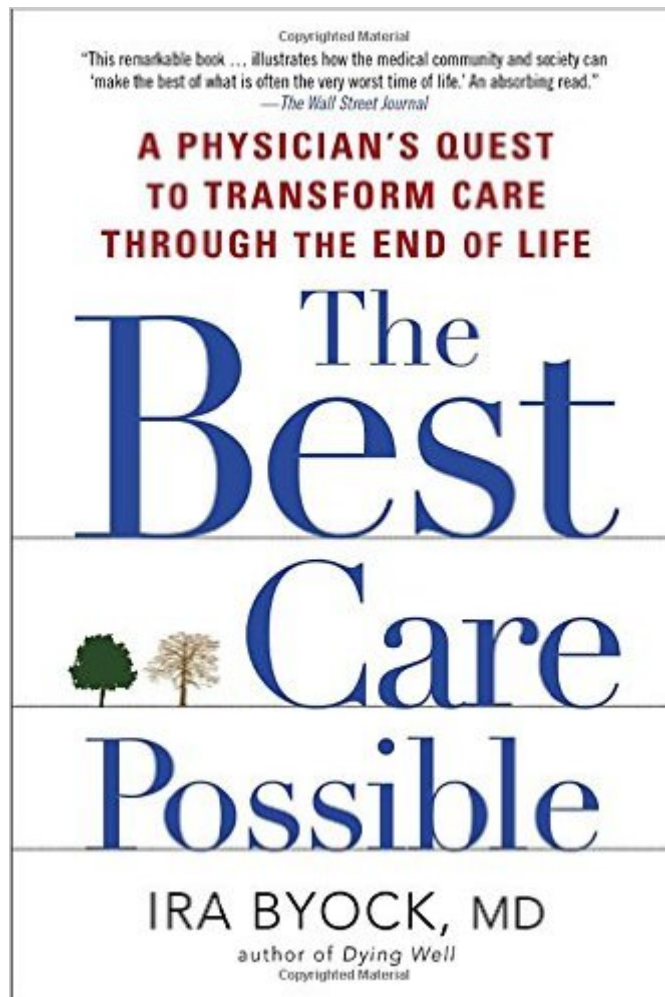


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# The Best Care Possible: A Physician's Quest To Transform Care Through The End Of Life



## Synopsis

A doctor on the front lines of hospital care illuminates one of the most important and controversial social issues of our time. It is harder to die in this country than ever before. Though the vast majority of Americans would prefer to die at homeâ€”which hospice care providesâ€”many of us spend our last days fearful and in pain in a healthcare system ruled by high-tech procedures and a philosophy to â€œfight disease and illness at all cost.â€• Dr. Ira Byock, one of the foremost palliative-care physicians in the country, argues that how we die represents a national crisis today. To ensure the best possible elder care, Dr. Byock explains we must not only remake our healthcare system but also move beyond our cultural aversion to thinking about death. *The Best Care Possible* is a compelling meditation on medicine and ethics told through page-turning life-or-death medical drama. It has the power to lead a new national conversation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is not intended for everyone. Just for those of us with an ailing loved one, or a loved one who who is dying. Or those of us who may at some time have an ailing loved one, or a loved one who may die. Or those of us who may at some time ourselves be ailing or dying. Dr Byock transforms the discussion of how we live our final days from a political hot potato to a rational, personal and heartfelt fact of life. As a physician, I am keenly aware of the miraculous medical tools that we as Americans are fortunate to have available to us. I am equally aware, however how the inappropriate use of these tools can contradict our ultimate responsibility as physicians to "above all

do no harm". More importantly, as the son of one of the patients whose journey through critical illness and hospice care is chronicled in *The Best Care Possible*, I have witnessed and experienced how an informed and caring medical team can positively effect not only the patient, but those who love her as well. Let the publication of this book awaken us all to the need for a national discussion, in a sane and rational way, of the need of advanced directives, and an assessment of how we choose to spend our final days. Sanford E Glikin, MD

Dr Ira Byock's new book, *"The Best Care Possible"* is one doctor's look at the inevitability we all face - death. Like taxes, death is a by-product of life and a "good death", while seemingly an oxymoron, is something Dr Byock has been writing about for many years. An "end-of-life" specialist at New Hampshire's Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, Ira Byock works with a team to put together as good and gentle a death experience as possible for his patients. Byock writes, that as we baby-boomers age, we're facing both the inevitable deaths of two generations - our parents, and then, in our turn, ourselves. As overall medical treatments advance, we're living longer and what used to kill us at earlier ages, doesn't do that so much anymore. And we're not dying as often in a family-setting. Most deaths occur in hospitals and nursing homes, with the dying tied up to machines that often keep them alive far past the point most people want to be kept alive. The old conundrum of "quality of life" vs "quantity of life". Dr Byock's book is not a "how-to" guide to making a "good death". There are no steps he advises taking, but rather he speaks to the larger issue, from both a medical standpoint and a personal one. As a doctor in a smallish community, Byock often has to look at both views when treating his patients. He writes about teaching medical students at Dartmouth Medical School to be aware of the responsibilities as future doctors when medical treatments fail at arresting illness and the patient moves on toward death. And when advanced chemo might be granting a cancer patient a somewhat longer life span but at the cost of agonising side effects. When does a "good life" sequence into a "good death"? How does the doctor, his or her support staff, and the patient's family and friends make that "good death" occur? He's a long-time believer in hospice. I think Dr Byock has written a few books on the subject of dying. This is the first one I've read, but not the last one. He asks questions of the reader in subtle ways that make the reader look past the often first and easy answers, to the tougher ones. But those are the answers that need to be thought about in end-of-life issues.

I wish I could send a copy of this to my mother, an RN who loved Dr. Byock's work and died 6 years ago... This book has changed the way I think about hospice and palliative medicine, not a minor

accomplishment as I have been practicing this subspecialty since 1988, before it officially even existed. Dr. Byock's earlier book "Dying Well" was a revelation to me because it held up a mirror, convinced me of the terrific potential of the work I had just begun doing and let me share that with others; "The Best Care Possible" holds such a mirror up to the whole country, showing us as a nation where we are failing to provide the care needed by the seriously ill, and how we can transform that, not only to benefit the suffering but to change the system. Patrick Clary, MD Exeter, New Hampshire

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