



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

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

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The desire to help our elders navigate health issues is clear and universal—how to assure proper care and a good ending is not. Combining adroit storytelling skills with expert advice, *The Gift of Caring: Saving Our Parents from the Perils of Modern Healthcare* brings the reader into all-too-familiar scenarios facing our aging parents and offers answers to questions we may not know to ask until it's too late.

Author and biologist Marcy Houle shares her personal journey of caring for her father, a surgeon, who developed Alzheimer's, and later her mother, who succumbed to other medical conditions. Like many children of aging parents, Marcy often felt powerless traveling this sad trajectory—watching them fall through the cracks of a fragmented and confusing healthcare system, where professionals often wrote off their symptoms as “just old age.” Not having the understanding of the changes that come with aging, she was led to believe there was nothing she could do to help.

The tragic secret? According to coauthor and geriatrics physician Elizabeth Eckstrom, these symptoms frequently are not “just old age.” Rather, the problem is that the current healthcare delivery model for older people is ill-equipped to provide the comprehensive, person-centered care seniors need. Today, thousands of aging people face unnecessary suffering, hospitalizations, nursing home stays, and even death due to complications that could have been prevented or treated. Even more troubling, many healthcare professionals have had little or no training in the care of older adults.

The Gift of Caring reveals these pitfalls and provides families with tools they can use to avoid them. Interspersed with every few chapters of Marcy's riveting story, Dr. Eckstrom shares professional medical insights, compiled from the latest research, into what Marcy could have done to safeguard her parents. She shows us how to navigate the system, how we can become our loved one's best advocate, and what we need to know to achieve healthy aging and meaningful, compassionate final years.

Honest, at times humorous, and ultimately uplifting, *The Gift of Caring* sheds new light on aging from twin perspectives: a story of a daughter desperately seeking help for the parents she loves, and a geriatrician who gives us the knowledge we need to insist upon a better way.

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