



And a Time to Die: How American Hospitals Shape the End of Life

By Sharon R. Kaufman

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Over the past thirty years, the way Americans experience death has been dramatically altered. The advent of medical technology capable of sustaining life without restoring health has changed where, when, and how we die. In this revelatory study, medical anthropologist Sharon R. Kaufman examines the powerful center of those changes: the hospital, where most Americans die today. She deftly links the experiences of patients and families, the work of hospital staff, and the ramifications of institutional bureaucracy to show the invisible power of the hospital system in shaping death and our individual experience of it. In doing so, Kaufman also speaks to the ways we understand what it means to be human and to be alive.

“An act of courage and a public service.”—*San Francisco Chronicle*

“This beautifully synthesized and disquieting account of how hospital patients die melds disciplined description with acute analysis, incorporating the voices of doctors, nurses, social workers, and patients in a provocative analysis of the modern American quest for a ‘good death.’”—*Publishers Weekly*

“Kaufman exposes the bureaucratic and ethical quandaries that hover over the modern deathbed.”—*Psychology Today*

“Kaufman’s analysis illuminates the complexity of the care of critically ill and dying patients [and] the ambiguity of slogans such as ‘death with dignity,’ ‘quality of life,’ and ‘stopping life support.’ . . . Thought-provoking reading for everyone contemplating the fate of us all.”—*New England Journal of Medicine*

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. This beautifully synthesized and disquieting account of how hospital patients die melds disciplined description with acute analysis, incorporating the voices of doctors, nurses, social workers and patients in a provocative analysis of the modern American quest for "a good death." In a series of case studies, Kaufman (*The Ageless Self: Sources of Meaning in Life*), a professor of medical anthropology at UC–San Francisco, shows how hospitals, by focusing on life-saving treatments, can indefinitely prolong the life of the critically ill patient, who may drift into an indeterminate zone, suspended between life and death. "[D]ying has become a technical endeavor, a negotiated decision and a murky matter biologically," she notes. Writing with penetrating clarity and detached compassion, and with respect for hospital staff and families alike, Kaufman reveals the dilemmas of hospital death in America today: the shift to patients' control of decision making despite the doctors' greater knowledge; the ethics and practical effects of resuscitation versus pain relief; the complexities of assessing "quality of life" while guessing at the desires of an unconscious patient. Kaufman's unwavering account reveals a culture of clinical practice that seems to have trouble acknowledging the inevitability of death, and that moves awkwardly from curative to palliative treatment. This deeply probing study lays bare the cultural and institutional assumptions and rhetoric that frame our search for "a good death."

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From [Booklist](#)

Medical anthropologist Kaufman says that only within the last few hundred years has death become a medical concern. Previously, people looked upon death as a private, personal rite of passage that took place within the confines of the home and surrounded by one's loved ones: a spiritual journey. Enter the medical professional, who takes prolonging life--hence, delaying death--as a mission, and dying is transformed into a last gasp for hope, a medical failure. It gets worse. Only within the last half-century has the number of people who die in hospitals come to vastly outnumber that of those dying at home. Moreover, recent scientific research has only served to broaden and more often blur the definition of death and life. Death as a personal experience has pretty much been erased and instead has become an institutional nightmare, one contorted by hospital politics, "bureaucratic logic without logical purpose," and the law. Kaufman exposes, with all its complexities, the clash of dying patients and their families with the only institutional resources available to them. *Donna Chavez*

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Review

"An act of courage and a public service."<*San Francisco Chronicle*>

(*San Francisco Chronicle*)

"An outstanding, timely examination of how and why people die or are kept alive in U.S. society. . . . You finish the book with a sense that although the future remains unknown, you are at least better informed and perhaps better able to cope with the inevitable."

(*USA Today*)

“This beautifully synthesized and disquieting account of how hospital patients die melds disciplined description with acute analysis, incorporating the voices of doctors, nurses, social workers, and patients in a provocative analysis of the modern American quest for a ‘good death.’”<*Publishers Weekly*>

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(*New England Journal of Medicine*)

“This is ethnography at its best. . . . [The author’s] quietly powerful book, which needs to be read by both family caregivers and medical professionals, belongs on the shelves of public, academic, and medical libraries.”

(*Library Journal*)

“Kaufman exposes the bureaucratic and ethical quandaries that hover over the modern deathbed.”

(*Psychology Today*)

"This is a book about slow dying in hospitals. . . . Through 27 case studies, Kaufman is able to describe and explore these intricacies thoroughly and with great success."

(Allan Kellehear *Aging & Society*)

"[The] style of this book makes it accessible and enjoyable and takes the reader into the world of the modern US hospital that is the place where most Americans die. . . . Highly recommended for anyone interested in end of life care in institutional settings."

(Jacqueline H. Watts *Mortality*)

"Through 27 compelling narratives, [the author] describes with uncanny accuracy and a gift for vivid detail the complex and often troubled dance that patients, families, physicians, nurses, and hospitals engage in as death nears. The book illuminates the central dilemma of dying in contemporary hospital culture."

(Paul B. Bascomb *JAMA*)

Users Review

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John Kirk:

Why? Because this And a Time to Die: How American Hospitals Shape the End of Life is an unordinary book that the inside of the reserve waiting for you to snap the idea but latter it will distress you with the secret the item inside. Reading this book adjacent to it was fantastic author who have write the book in such wonderful way makes the content on the inside easier to understand, entertaining means but still convey the meaning entirely. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this any more or you going to regret it. This book will give you a lot of positive aspects than the other book include such as help improving your ability and your critical thinking method. So , still want to hold up having that book? If I have been you I will go to the publication store hurriedly.

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