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Living Better: Every Patient's Guide to Living with Illness

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Chronic illness saps one's strength, depletes one's energy, and crushes one's spirit. Or does it? The message in this book is that it need not do any of these things to the point of destroying the quality of life, if life and illness are correctly approached.

Both authors suffer from chronic illness themselves; both have made drastic adjustments in lifestyle and career. Their message is multi-faceted; including not only the need to care for a person's illness, but also the need to cope with doctors and medical bills, to recognize the necessity of asking for help, and the need to nurture spirit.

The book is divided into several parts; each is concerned with a different aspect of life with a chronic illness. The chapters on learning to work with doctors and health care professionals are moderately helpful for someone who has never had a sustained relationship with the medical world. Many other books are cited with helpful information on how to cope with learning about a disease or condition, how to find competent professionals, and how to insist on adequate care.

The chapter concerning the financial stresses of illness is less useful; although its opening paragraphs offer resources, the only place mentioned is the government's Medicare Website; the information on medical coverage and coping with bills is of limited usefulness—especially to someone already stressed from dealing with chronic health problems, whether their own or those of a family member.

More helpful than the first part of the book is the portion concerning the mind-body connection in which the authors discuss the effect of the mind and the attitude—and the spirit—on the body's ability to cope with stress and illness. There is practical material here—coping mechanisms for the temptation to try too much; ways to regain hope when one is depressed; learning how to improve one's quality of life.

The authors have compiled a book that should give sufferers a feeling that someone understands the problems they are going through. The writing is sometimes uneven, but the desire to help is clear, and there is plenty of worthwhile information.

MARLENE SATTER (January / February 2001)

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