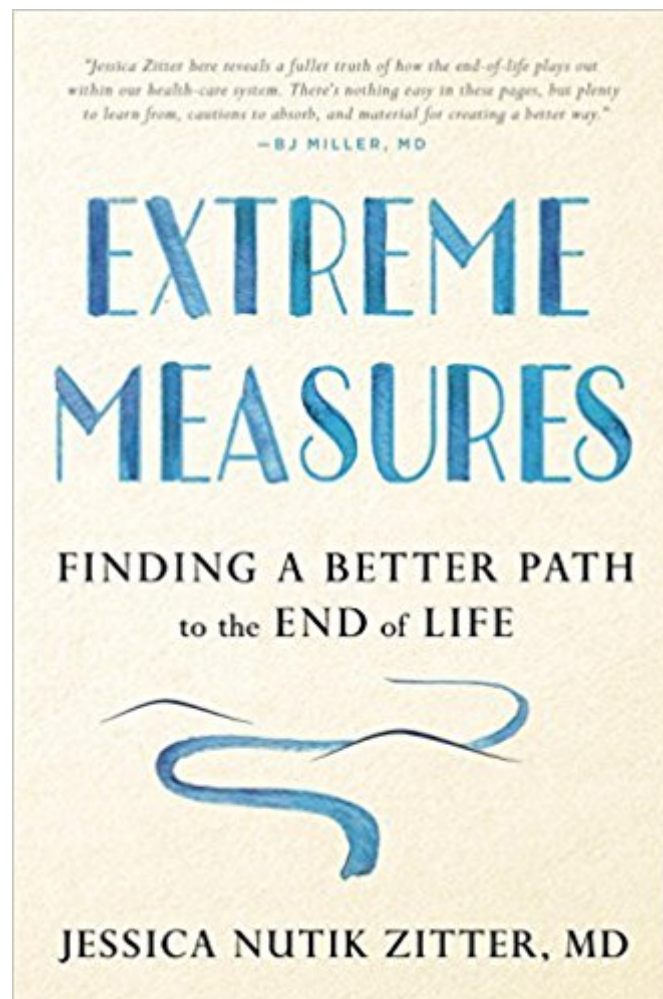




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Extreme Measures: Finding A Better Path To The End Of Life



Synopsis

For readers of *Being Mortal* and *Modern Death*, an ICU and Palliative Care specialist offers a framework for a better way to exit life that will change our medical culture at the deepest level. In medical school, no one teaches you how to let a patient die. Jessica Zitter became a doctor because she wanted to be a hero. She elected to specialize in critical care—to become an ICU physician—and imagined herself swooping in to rescue patients from the brink of death. But then during her first code she found herself cracking the ribs of a patient so old and frail it was unimaginable he would ever come back to life. She began to question her choice. *Extreme Measures* charts Zitter's journey from wanting to be one kind of hero to becoming another—a doctor who prioritizes the patient's values and preferences in an environment where the default choice is the extreme use of technology. In our current medical culture, the old and the ill are put on what she terms the End-of-Life Conveyor belt. They are intubated, catheterized, and even shelved away in care facilities to suffer their final days alone, confused, and often in pain. In her work Zitter has learned what patients fear more than death itself: the prospect of dying badly. She builds bridges between patients and caregivers, formulates plans to allay patients' pain and anxiety, and enlists the support of loved ones so that life can end well, even beautifully. Filled with rich patient stories that make *Extreme Measures* a compelling medical narrative, *Extreme Measures* enlarges the national conversation as it thoughtfully and compassionately examines an experience that defines being human.

Book Information

Hardcover: 352 pages

Publisher: Avery; 1 edition (February 21, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1101982551

ISBN-13: 978-1101982556

Product Dimensions: 6.3 x 1.1 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 52 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #10,967 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #2 in Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Medicine > Clinical > Hospice & Palliative Care #5 in Books > Medical Books > Medicine > Hospice Care #7 in Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health

Customer Reviews

"Like Atul Gawande's *Being Mortal*, Zitter's book shows how knowing when to do nothing is as vital to being a good doctor as knowing when to do everything." — **New York Times Book Review**

"Jessica here reveals a fuller truth of how the end-of-life plays out within our healthcare system. There's nothing easy in these pages, but plenty to learn from, cautions to absorb, and material for creating a better way." — **BJ Miller, MD, Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine at UCSF**

"Part memoir, part exposé, this book is an insider's view of intensive care in America and its impact on how we die, written by a physician uniquely positioned to examine end-of-life care. Dr. Jessica Zitter's wisdom derives from a career whose trajectory she specializes in both ICU and palliative medicine — models a rethinking of care for the dying. Her book is a trenchant critique and a clarion call for end-of-life care that aligns with what each patient values most." — **Lucy Kalanithi, MD**

"Dr. Zitter has pulled back the curtain on the needless suffering undergone by the dying in Intensive Care. Honest about her own uncertainties, mistakes and limitations, she spares no one, not even herself. The average person will learn much about the pitfalls of navigating the strange subculture of medicine close to the end of life." — **Katy Butler, author of *Knocking on Heaven's Door: The Path to a Better Way of Death* and *A Good End of Life: a Practical Guide***

"America's healthcare system inadvertently makes things worse for dying patients and their families. This situation calls for Extreme Measures — and this book is the remedy we need. Dr. Zitter's guidance is an elixir of medical sophistication, practical savvy, and timeless soulfulness. She writes with the clinical mastery of an intensivist and the personal sensitivity of a trusted friend." — **Ira Byock, MD, author of *The Best Care Possible***

"Required reading for every young medical student and every family member wondering how to help the people they love live well to the end." — **Ellen Goodman, founder of The Conversation Project**

"With compassion, intelligence, and a rare expertise, Jessica Zitter shines a light on some of the most difficult issues we face in our lives." — **Angelo Volandes, MD, author of *The Conversation: A Revolutionary Plan for End-of-Life Care***

"You wouldn't take a trip to a foreign country without learning as much as you could about its rituals, its culture, and its landscape. The ICU, a place many of us will pass through at least once in our lives, is as foreign as it gets. Thus Dr. Zitter provides an essential illumination for her fellow humans." — **Diane E. Meier, MD, Director, Center to Advance Palliative Care**

"A

stunning portrait of the ways decisions in the intensive care unit shape the way we live and die now. Whether we live with illness, love someone who is facing these decisions, or care for them professionally, Dr. Zitter has written a call to action that none of us can ignore. Anthony Back MD, author of Mastering Communication with Seriously Ill Patients: Balancing Honesty with Empathy and Hope "Extreme Measures provides a gripping and intimate tour of the experiences and dilemmas physicians, patients and families face dealing with terminal illness in the modern ICU. A tour de force for those seeking to better understand and improve care of patients and families at end of life." James Mittelberger MD, MPH, FACP, FAAHPM, Optum Director and Chief Medical Officer, Center for Palliative Care and Supportive Care "Clarity and compassion unite in this touching and convincing new conversation on comfortable, patient-centered end-of-life care." Kirkus Reviews

Jessica Nutik Zitter, M.D., MPH, is an expert on the medical experience of death and dying. She attended Stanford University and Case Western Reserve Medical School, and completed her residency in internal medicine at the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. She was a fellow in pulmonary and critical care medicine at the University of California San Francisco. Zitter is double-boarded in the two specialties of pulmonary/critical care medicine and palliative care medicine—a rare combination. She writes for The New York Times, The Huffington Post, Pacific Standard, The Atlantic, and Journal of Palliative Medicine, and is featured in Extremis, an Oscar-nominated Netflix documentary about end-of-life decision-making in an ICU.

I am a 62 year old retired medical doctor who could relate to every aspect of this book from the rigors of medical training to the mental anguish of observing patients and loved ones die. I plan on recommending this book to all my friends and family so we can best prepare ourselves for our loved ones and our own deaths.

Very important well done book!

This is by far my favorite book to date on the subject! As a family medicine trained nursing home physician interested in hospice & palliative, this was especially appropriate for me. I felt all of the emotions with Dr. Zitter & was returned to many situations I have experienced in my short career. Some good & some bad but all a lesson. I applaud Dr. Z for her candor, emotion, willingness to share & vulnerability. Thank you for giving us all permission to feel, learn, & grow. I am a better

physician & human after reading your words. For this I will be forever grateful!

First of all, *EXTREME MEASURES* is a very tough book to read. And this may be particularly true for a reader like myself who, might as well admit it, is already well into that eighth inning of life. Because Dr. Nutik Zitter makes painfully clear, with many well-documented and dramatically presented case studies, how our health and medical system has, for perhaps way too long, gone in the direction of try everything, do anything, just keep the patient alive, even if the quality of life has markedly decreased, or will. Early in her narrative, the author raises the picture of the kindly old grey-haired doctor so often seen in Norman Rockwell paintings, and admits - "When I think of who I want at my bedside when I'm sick, it is someone like those doctors - someone who knows me well and will sit with me as long as I need, with a watchful, concerned eye." Now instead of those old-fashioned doctors who treated the whole person, we have specialists and subspecialists who treat one organ, without taking into account the person. Although Nutik Zitter recognizes how unlikely it is that we'll ever get back to that country practitioner type, she does feel it is vitally important that the needs and the feelings of the patient take precedence again - that "patient autonomy implies that the patient is empowered to make decisions free from coercion." She stresses too the importance, in end-of-life situations, of "the ability to break bad news and reassess goals of care." Otherwise, too many patients end up on the medical and technological "conveyor belt" that leads to finishing their lives attached to machines and isolated from the warmth of family and human contact that might make death less frightening. *EXTREME MEASURES* is chock full of case studies of people who do end up on that conveyor, many of which will make you wince in shock or in recognition, particularly if you have witnessed the slow and steady decline of a loved one, as I have. The author describes several kinds of death in clinical terms. One I recognized, VSED (voluntary stopping of eating and drinking). It was the method my mother chose at the age of 96. Death does not take long when this happens. Nutik Zitter explains why people choose to die this way, noting - "Often this is due to the person's perception that her quality of life is no longer acceptable. The act may also provide a sense of control and autonomy at this most vulnerable time of life." Overall, *EXTREME MEASURES* forces the reader to look closely at the end of life and at the choices available, addressing the importance of, say, advance directives, living wills, or medical powers of attorney. Too often in our society, people still turn away from death, try to deny it. But it is, after all, where we are all headed. Reading this book may be a good way into "having the talk" with your family and loved ones. I will recommend it for that reason. Note: I gave the book four stars, but that is probably way too 'subjective,' just because, as I said at the outset, this is a very tough book

to read. Nutik Zitter has done her homework. She pulls no punches. She admits to making many mistakes herself as a one-time ICU practicing physician. I commend her for tackling such a tough subject - one that most people would probably prefer not to discuss.- Tim Bazzett, author of the memoir, BOOKLOVER

Outstanding! Extreme Measures arrived at my door on Friday, I started it Saturday evening, and finished it Sunday afternoon. Replete with personal anecdotes and stories from a career that has spanned more than 20 years, Dr. Zitter succeeds in exploring and revealing the complexities, moral and ethical, of end-of-life care in twenty-first century America. As she so thoughtfully and compassionately points out, striving for a good death is no less important than fiercely fighting to help those who may recover, once the point has been reached where cure is no longer possible and the costs of delaying the inevitable are measured in dehumanizing and often unbearable suffering for patient and family alike. Dr. Zitter is a very gifted writer, but more importantly: She shows herself to be the physician any of us would want caring for ourselves or for our loved ones in our hour of need.

Working in long term care and rehabilitation I am amazed how very few patients are presented with choices in an honest manner. Extreme Measures is a breath of fresh air, candid and humane. The author willingly exposes her own shortcomings/ignorance as a young physician when embarking on the journey of not only saving lives but saving patients from unnecessary suffering. I applaud her. There is no right or wrong to informed choices, but there is literally a lot "deathly" wrong with suffering due to ignorance or unwillingness to share the good the bad and the ugly with those most vulnerable. Only when we lift the veil and shadow off of death can we get up close and personal with our own personal endings and celebrate death as honorable and human as birth.

The content is necessary reading in order to understand why prolonging life at all costs doesn't make sense. What I didn't like about this book was how long the author goes on and on telling about case after case of why this is true. I got the idea after the first ten or so, but it continues to tell of patient after patient who died a non-peaceful death. Maybe this is necessary to ensure the reader really gets the message, but I found myself skipping ahead through some cases.

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