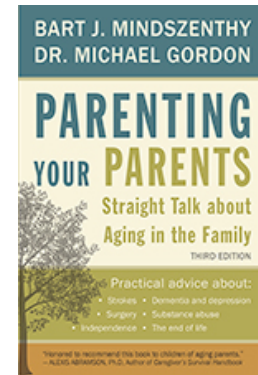


Book excerpt:

Making the 'right' decisions regarding our parents' care

Excerpted from *Parenting Your Parents: Straight Talk about Aging in the Family*, by Bart J. Mindszenty and Michael Gordon. Copyright © Dundurn Press, 2013. All rights reserved. Published by Dundurn Press (dundurn.com).



I learned from my mother's illness that children often find it difficult to accept bad outcomes and take it upon themselves to try to rectify the situation, especially in institutional settings. This is very reasonable and when done properly can lead to some improvements in care. It is useful to understand what clinical options make sense and to try to act on them. It is important not to allow others to make decisions that are very important to a family member. And while well meaning others may provide advice and input, ultimately it is the family who has to decide what is right. However, once that decision is made, it is important not to revert to "what if" scenarios, but rather to accept that whatever decision was made was the right one. I use this concept with my patients and families who struggle with decisions. I try to help them understand that there are rarely "right" answers to difficult decisions—they can only do the best they can, and they must live with their decision as the best they could have made under the circumstances.

One of the important lessons I learned from caring for my father is knowing that timing is often critical in decision-making. It is not possible or proper to force a situation when the parent is not ready for that decision to be made. It becomes counterproductive to keep badgering a parent to make a decision that he or she is not yet prepared to make. I saw this in terms of my father's reluctance to move from his home until it was clear that he was in danger, and also in terms of his hearing aid—when he was ready, that was the only time to act. On the other hand, I also learned and now use in my practice the idea that sometimes waiting until someone is ready may be dangerous and result in acting too late. I try to help patients and their families make difficult decisions by outlining the implications of waiting too long to make a necessary move.

Another important lesson I have learned is that you *can* teach an old dog new tricks, meaning the opportunities to grow and develop can continue at every age. It is not necessarily the case that moving from one's own home to a facility is the

beginning of the end; rather, it may be the beginning of a new era of interaction and enjoyment. I have seen this in my practice, but most important, I have now experienced it with my father. He had been transformed from a near-hermit, deteriorating physically and mentally, to a vibrant, active person who participated in social activities, including dancing and exercise programs. To see him greeted by his buddies at the retirement home lunch program was very satisfying for me, as I knew that once again my father was a *somebody*.