

The Patient's Playbook: How to Save Your Life and the Lives of Those You Love

By Leslie D. Michelson

Too many Americans die each year as a result of preventable medical error—mistakes, complications, and misdiagnoses. And many more of us are not receiving the best care possible, even though it's readily available and we're entitled to it. The key is knowing how to access it.

The Patient's Playbook is a call to action. It will change the way you manage your health and the health of your family, and it will show you how to choose the right doctor, coordinate the best care, and get to the No-Mistake Zone in medical decision making. Leslie D. Michelson has devoted his life's work to helping people achieve superior medical outcomes at every stage of their lives. Michelson presents real-life stories that impart lessons and illuminate his easy-to-follow strategies for navigating complex situations and cases.

The Patient's Playbook is an essential guide to the most effective techniques for getting the best from a broken system: sourcing excellent physicians, selecting the right treatment protocols, researching with precision, and structuring the ideal support team. Along the way you will learn:

Why having the right primary care physician will change your life

Three things you can do right now to be better prepared when illness strikes

The ten must-ask questions at the end of a hospital stay

How to protect yourself from unnecessary and dangerous treatments

Ways to avoid the four most common mistakes in the first twenty-four hours of a medical emergency

This book will enable you to become a smarter health care consumer—and to replace anxiety with confidence.

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The Patient's Playbook: How to Save Your Life and the Lives of Those You Love Summary Details

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Review

A Word from the Doctors:

"The decisions you make about your medical care will have a profound impact on you and your family's life.... Successfully steering through the medical system can be a challenge. In *The Patient's Playbook*, Michelson gives away secrets of the trade—lessons he's learned from more than thirty years of helping people get better outcomes.... He levels the playing field by providing average patients who have ordinary health insurance with the resources, advice, and tools they need to make better medical decisions.... As a patient, you have more power than you think. This book will help you find that power and use it to maximum advantage."

—*From the Foreword by Peter T. Scardino, M.D., Chair, Department of Surgery, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center*

"What a tour de force! Every health care consumer (and caregiver) can greatly benefit from this practical guide to achieving better health outcomes. Simple, actionable advice abounds, and each recommendation for how to best navigate the complex health care system is enriched with Leslie Michelson's recounting of poignant stories from his extensive experience. With this playbook, all of us can better protect our most valuable asset--our health."

—*Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., Distinguished Professor, UCLA Fielding School of Public Health and Geffen School of Medicine, and former director of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health*

Reviews:

"Trust me—you need this guide because everyone at some point faces a health crisis. Michelson details, step by crucial step, how to navigate the terrifying world of doctors, hospitals, second opinions, drug trials, and insurance so you get lifesaving results."

—*AARP Best Books of 2015*

"Michelson implores patients to be intensely involved in their own care.... He urges patients...to 'bring their A-game' to the doctor's office...advocat[ing] smart care, not more care."

—*The Wall Street Journal*

"In this unique and useful book, [Michelson] maps out a plan to organize competent medical care when needed.... He provides advice and resources that help individuals become medically prepared, make sound health-care decisions, and more likely achieve favorable results.... An invaluable resource, *The Patient's Playbook* can effectively assist individuals in navigating the complex and often overwhelming world of illness."

—*Booklist (Starred Review)*

"Unlike most how-to books, this one is thick with advice and instructions....what's at stake: Your need to obtain the best possible diagnosis and treatment from an expensive but fractured network of health care providers....The steps Michelson offers for negotiating the system mirror what his company does for patients—finding top experts and coordinating care....his insights about the importance of getting your caregivers to notice and talk to you is invaluable."

—*Sarasota Herald-Tribune*

"A primer on making the right moves as an active participant in your health care.... Michelson is the CEO of a company that works with patients to get the best possible care—not only from the best possible physicians...but also through guiding them through the process described in this book, one that shifts the role of care director over to the patient...with this useful book, patients can have more say over what direction treatment takes rather than just going along for the ride."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

About the Author

LESLIE D. MICHELSON is the founder, chairman, and CEO of Private Health Management, a unique patient-focused company dedicated to helping individuals and corporate clients obtain exceptional medical care. He is a highly sought-after expert who has spent the last thirty years guiding thousands of people through our complex health care system. Prior to founding Private Health Management in 2007, Michelson was the CEO of the Prostate Cancer Foundation. He received his B.A. from Johns Hopkins University and a J.D. from Yale Law School. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife, Beth.

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Introduction

After I was born, in 1951, my mother went into a major postpartum depression. For the first six months of my life, she couldn't get out of bed, leaving me in the care of my father and maternal grandmother. I actually didn't learn about this until I was forty-five, and someone casually mentioned it at a party. Sadly, the stigma of psychiatric illness was so great at the time (and still can be today) that families touched by chronic depression often had to carry the burden in silence. My parents had been counseled by doctors that they shouldn't discuss it, so they didn't.

My mother eventually recovered, but then she became bipolar, which meant there were days, months, and years when she'd be fine, and then long periods when she was incapable of getting up, making dinner, or holding a conversation. During her manic phases, she'd be on a high for days or weeks, talking nonstop and sometimes being cruel to me and others I know she loved. I couldn't predict when her disease would take control of her. Coming home from school, I never knew if I'd be greeted by a fire-breathing dragon or a smiling mother with a glass of milk and a plate of cookies. I had to feel around the edges of the door for danger, the way they teach you in fire safety training.

When I was ten, my mother screamed at me for forty-five minutes because I left a sneaker on the steps. The only ten-year-old who hasn't left a sneaker on the steps is a ten-year-old who doesn't have sneakers or steps.

During an ugly scene when I was twelve or thirteen, I physically held my mother down in a chair and told her, "You will stop yelling at my brother right now." That moment changed everything between us. She was my mother, and I loved her, but her disease was dangerous, and I had to be assertive.

Although my mother's illness was hard on me, it had to have been worse for my father. The instant I was born, he lost his wife. And yet he remained extraordinarily positive and strong. He was a genuine role model, the moral center of gravity for every community that he was in—whether it was our larger family, the synagogue, the Boy Scouts, his business, or his trade association. He was the guy who would solve other people's problems. I could talk to Dad for hours.

By my early teens, I was actively involved in helping with my mother's care. That was when she received her first electroshock therapy treatment for recurring depression. Later, we had her on daily lithium, a mood stabilizer. I had to grow up and become a responsible caregiver at a very young age.

And here's where the story gets complicated. When I was in high school, my father came home one evening, clearly agitated. For me, the sun came up at night when my father walked through the door. As tired as he was, those hours with him were absolutely precious. If he came home anxious or upset, that was a big deal.

He had gone for his annual physical that day with his primary care physician, a man with whom he'd attended high school in Newark, New Jersey. The doctor had recommended that my father see a certain cardiologist. A week or two later Dad came home even more rattled than before. The cardiologist had told him he needed to have open-heart surgery.

I was overcome with worry. Was my dad going to die? Losing him wouldn't just mean I'd be an orphan, practically speaking; it would mean I'd have to take full responsibility for my mother. That was not a reality I could handle.

That night I couldn't sleep. The next day I couldn't concentrate at school. I got home that afternoon and picked up the phone to dial Lenox Hill Hospital in New York. Although we lived in suburban Union, New Jersey, I read The New York Times every night, and somehow I recalled "Lenox Hill" always being mentioned. I knew that when you wanted to go to a nice restaurant, see a good play, or go to a top hospital—you went to New York.

"Can I please speak to the head of cardiology?" I asked. I'm sure my teenage voice must have cracked on the line as I spoke, but I wasn't going to aim low.

"Dad," I announced when my father got home, "I set up an appointment for you to get a second opinion from the chairman of cardiology at Lenox Hill."

"You know, that's a good idea," he said. "I'm gonna do it." And that was that.

On the day of his appointment, I waited at home in agony. This had to go right. I couldn't imagine a future without him. I was seeing the walls coming down.

It was all I could do not to knock him over when he walked in the door. "What did he say, Dad? What did he

say?"

"He said, 'There's nothing wrong with your heart, and the doctor who recommended surgery should be shot in a public square.' "

Exact words. He was ecstatic. And I still remember where I was standing in the kitchen when he said it. I remember this better than I remember what I had for breakfast today.

My father never had any heart problems. No high blood pressure, no calcium in his coronaries, no leaky valves. He passed away in 2007, succumbing to something totally unrelated to his heart. But back in 1988, when I was building my first company, I met Dr. Robert H. Brook, who was then the vice president and director of RAND Health, a health policy think tank. He had just published research showing that many of the major surgical procedures being done in the United States were harming rather than helping patients. In fact, when it came to coronary artery bypass graft surgeries—what my father was told he needed—14 percent were done for "inappropriate reasons," and 30 percent were done for "equivocal" reasons. I thought, My God, this doctor has found scientific evidence of what I suspected was going on some twenty years ago.

I still think of my father every day and how his "case" ignited my passion for helping people to get better care. Managing serious illness is not easy, but armed with the knowledge in this book, and the support of a trusted primary care doctor, I truly believe that everyone can—and must—become a more powerful and effective health care consumer.

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