

Frequently asked questions - Zoë A Lewis, M.D.

Tell us a bit about yourself. What would you like us to know about you?

I moved about quite a bit in my life, in the States and abroad. I discovered in my twenties my great love of travel, ethnic rural people, and above all, the process of learning new things and teaching what I learn to others. I was born and lived my first twenty years in a suburb of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and completed my university and graduate medical training in the area. I then spent over ten years living in Rome, Italy. While I earned my medical degree summa cum laude, (La Sapienza, L' Università di Roma Medical School), I taught and also tutored science and computer science to children for international private schools. Later on, once again I got involved with teaching, this time professionals in Boston, Massachusetts. I held a variety of teaching responsibilities ever since. I was proud of the adult education course I started in Cambridge, Massachusetts on advance directives during a hiatus period between jobs. I also am proud of the fact I worked for Brigham and Women's Hospital and other Partner Organization Hospitals, and got Harvard Medical School credentials. I began a palliative care consult service for the Caritas Healthcare System. It was also in Boston that I got more involved in end-of-life care for dementia patients, developing creative ways of providing patient care on hospice services using music and art therapy, among other techniques while I held the position as Corporate Medical Director for one of New England's largest hospice providers. I also traveled to over 39 countries and 116 cities since university, under a variety of motives for pleasure or business.

Why did you write the book, "I Hope they Know"?

"I wrote, "I Hope They Know: The Essential Handbook on Alzheimer's disease and Care", because I experienced the suffering families were going through with this disease first hand and wanted to help. All of us have a moment when we feel some outrage or shock over some particular thing and get motivated to action. I knew I wanted to help more folks than those in my direct care, and that meant through the power of a book. My medical scope is complete considering Alzheimer's care giving. I diagnosed men and women in my office, and worked with them and their caregivers in nursing homes and hospitals. I helped them die with dignity as a hospice physician and softened the blow with bereavement. In 2007, I took some time off to write about my experiences while I traveled in India and Sri Lanka. I saw the book in my mind's eye, inclusive of the experiences of others I respected in the field of dementia care and wanted to create a comprehensive resource that focused families and loved ones on finding personalized solutions to preserve and protect the best quality of life for the longest period of time. No one can bear to see a loved one suffer. My life's work in medicine and caring for others was most affected by taking care of Alzheimer's patients at the end of life. I write about how I was moved in the preface of the book and why I tried to create a solution for those struggling with Alzheimer's disease.

How did you come to use 7 contributing authors and what is the story behind their work?

I describe in the book why I chose each contributing author. All but two contributors, at the time, had a family experience with the disease, with one parent dying with Alzheimer's. Each has worked extensively in the field of Alzheimer's or care giving. Their knowledge in dealing with Alzheimer's is described on a very personal level.

Why did you translate the book into Spanish?

I studied medicine in Italian, and can appreciate differences in context and culture when dealing with disease and care giving. Alzheimer's disease affects millions of Latinos in America. 26 million people speak Spanish in the USA – and I live

in Miami. I saw a need and reached out to meet it. Investigations show they are disparities in care giving and access to programs. We are failing this group of individuals.

What are you doing now?

I work as a locum tenens hospitalist for a locum company in acute care settings in Florida and Massachusetts from my home base in Miami Beach, Florida. I also produce and host a free monthly radio program on Blogtalk radio: Hospice Radio, on end-of-life care and speak nationally on Alzheimer's disease. I am an independent consultant for hospice programs. Also, I am always engaged in ways to third-party distribute my two books, "I Hope They Know: The Essential Handbook on Alzheimer's Disease and Care", together with "Espero que sepan: La guía holística para la enfermedad de Alzheimer," 2009, Virtualbookworm Publishing. I want to donate the book to as many people as possible. I also published a poetry collection – Poetic Penumbra and do local poetry readings. I have hobbies and a yoga practice.

What were the reasons for creating a radio program on Hospice and Aging?

I had some free time in between consulting work and my locum jobs and I had been on two other radio programs and decided to create, produce and host my own show with a narrow focus on end-of-life care.

What is your favorite quote and how do you relate it to your life?

Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act I, Scene III where Polonius replies: "This above all: to thine own self be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man."

The act of self-discovery, determining what we love, then dedicating our life to further develop our unique gifts is my take. As we consciously develop our gifts as skills, we may pass to the point we feel the need to give to others; a nice cycle of fulfillment. My writing is this – my love of teaching and helping others with a focus on compassion. I recognized I was most shocked and affected by the terminal phase of Alzheimer's and I was moved to action.

Whose work do you admire?

Any person who is involved in humanitarian work that involves their own personal sacrifice – there are too many faces that we see 'associated with grand acts of benevolence', when there is an army of unseen aid workers that live authentic lives, risking their own – without the publicity. All of those people, and most especially, the hospice home health aides, each and every one, are angels in disguise!