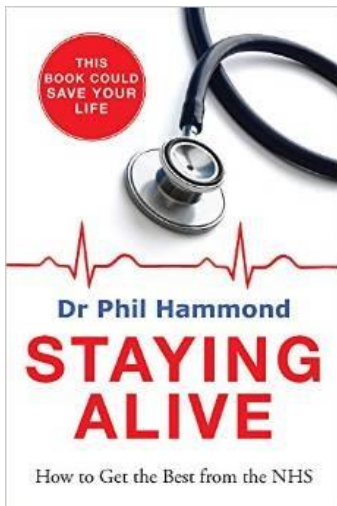


**MACMILLAN  
CANCER SUPPORT**

# BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



**Staying alive. How to get the best from the NHS (2015)**

Hammond P.

London: Quercus, 2015.

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£14.99.

**Average star rating 4.0 (out of 5)**

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This is a lengthy book, but it deals comprehensively with all aspects of the NHS and will be invaluable for anyone, for an understanding of how the NHS works and how best to approach healthcare professionals and get the service you want. It flows well considering its comprehensive scope. It is extremely easy to understand and all terms are explained fully. The simple design is effective and appropriate.

A very useful text. I like it a lot. It will be useful at any stage, from diagnosis to post treatment. It is accurate and informative, written by somebody with first-hand experience of the NHS, warts and all. I didn't notice any inaccuracies but there are huge geographical variations (the postcode lottery), so things may vary depending on where you live.

#### **Post treatment for kidney cancer (56-65) (November 2015)**

This is a brilliant read, clever and funny, with lots of anecdotes and patient stories, and loads of information on websites. It's a "must read" for everyone; it's our NHS and our responsibility to help it work well for us all. I'm as guilty as anyone of not giving enough good feedback when things go well but moaning when they don't. I wouldn't be alive today without the NHS and the brilliant care I've had, but there are things that could have been better and I'd like to help make them so in future. People with cancer experience so many aspects of treatment and care and are in a rare position to influence for good; let's read this book, spread the word and get on with it!

#### **Living with non-Hodgkin lymphoma (56-65) (November 2015)**

This is full of helpful and empowering information for patients but will also help every doctor that has to encounter patients! I am an informed patient and can advocate for myself but I still sometimes find it hard to be heard. It is most useful for managing the many appointments, taking in the huge amount of information thrown at you and knowing how to get the best out of it all. It flows well and is easy to understand. The use of acronyms is very helpful. It is encouraging and I like that it is empowering for patients. The only thing I don't like is that it shows that it is still necessary to be one's own advocate and fight for good care.

#### **Living with breast cancer (46-55) (October 2015)**

There is something for everyone in this book. It is compassionate, grounded in personal narratives collected over time, and resonates with common sense. It is a treasure trove of philosophy, a wide-ranging meditation upon the meaning of medicine and what we are losing in a target-driven NHS. It encompasses the whole patient journey and is about empowering patients and carers to have a voice in what can at times seem overwhelming. It covers more than critical illness; it gives practical guidance on how to achieve the best care at the right time. It explains how and why we need to take more responsibility for our wellbeing and not blindly rely on a system that is overburdened and that can fail to meet expectations that are too high.

It begins with how we can live well and continues through diagnosis, support, decision making, treatments, the right care, and how to die well. It covers enormous ground and contains a huge number of useful links and intriguing references, which add extra value. It is peppered with very human case studies, told directly by patients, some of which are very uplifting.

Dr Hammond is an excellent writer who has gone to great lengths to try to understand his readers. The text and layout is varied, including fragmented paragraphs, lists, clear subheadings, and a variety of fonts. Dr Hammond gives bucket loads of useful tips and advice, and on almost every page there's plenty to learn about symptoms, diseases, treatments and so much more – without the jargon.

It is a deeply personal, human book, full of interviews from those on whom the NHS depends. Everyone speaks with a passion and belief about what the NHS needs and always it is never to lose sight of the person behind the illness. I like the lightness and clarity that the author brings to what can be difficult topics. It is grounded in wise experience and every point made has a human story to support it. Dr Hammond is not one to shy away from NHS failure; he wants us to know what to look out for, what to be wary of, as well as when to know that we are being cared for safely and well. He knows that, only by being informed about what to watch out for, can we, together with the people who work in the NHS, make the NHS the brilliant thing it can and should be. It is a sad read because the author paints a picture of how people want the NHS to work and the gap just feels too wide to bridge.

What stands are the wonderful descriptions of how we (as citizens and patients) can create better, healthier and more sustainable lives and partnerships with the NHS. This means getting involved and playing our part; for example, taking responsibility for our health through supported self-care, learning how to recognise and manage common ailments, and using emergency services wisely. Every NHS user should be given this book to read.

Whilst not specifically a book about living with cancer, 'Staying alive' builds on many moving, insightful and inspirational stories and experiences from real patients to encourage us to become more curious about medical matters and to connect not only with others around us, but also nurses and doctors and all the other important people working in the NHS. It isn't detrimental or scathing about the NHS – everything about this book shouts compassion.

**Patient and carer (head and neck cancer) (46-55) (August 2015)**

This is useful for patients, carers and professionals for negotiating the NHS and learning from the experience of others. It is very easy to read, with no jargon. It contains a lot of useful information on how to negotiate your way through the NHS as an active participant in your care, be empowered with knowledge to take charge to personalise what matters to you and get the right care. It is full of patient testimonials and lessons learnt from their experience. The author advocates using the internet – blogging, sharing your experience to benefit not only yourself but also others. There are some useful websites for information. It also addresses the difficult subject of planning for your death. There is an understanding of patients' feelings and views.

This book has so much information to empower patients, for example: how to use your GP consultation wisely by preparing ahead; questions to ask; and keeping your medical history handy. I definitely recommend it to anyone living with a chronic condition who has to use the NHS long term.

### **Living with cancer (56-65) (August 2015)**

This eye-opening book is a must read for everyone in the UK who is receiving NHS care. It gives the reader a thorough understanding of the current system – its limitations, what it is good at – and how to conduct a meaningful dialogue with health care professionals, and encourages everyone to take an active role and become part of the health care team in dealing with health issues.

Its message is that patients need to become active members of the health care team to achieve the best outcome. It will guide someone living with cancer or caring for someone with cancer through each stage of the NHS process, from getting a referral, through diagnosis and planning treatment, to care after leaving hospital. So that we can be an active member of the health care team, the author encourages us to research for information, ask intelligent questions and give feedback. Practical skills, such as note taking in meetings and diary keeping, are essential for correct records. Knowing the NICE guideline will help you establish if your care is appropriate. Different scenarios and real-life stories show the reader that becoming an active member of the health care team can help achieve a speedy diagnosis and correct treatment plan. This approach helps informed decision making, facilitates dialogue, embraces understanding and keeps error to a minimum, especially when one is facing a situation such as deciding on when and how to get a second opinion, whether to stop a difficult treatment, or to seek medical care elsewhere.

The author handles the topic in a logical order in five chapters. In the first chapter (NHS and us) he outlines the principles, purpose and practicalities of the NHS, laying out the ideals and the problems meeting those ideals, such as the £30 billion financial black hole, before turning to the rights and responsibilities of users. Having set the scene, he discusses in Chapter 2 how to use the imperfect NHS safely. In Chapter 3, he deals with the important issue of getting the right care from birth to older age. He then turns his focus onto two very difficult issues; in Chapter 4, he discusses the issue of putting wrong care right, and in Chapter 5, the right death for you. In each of these chapters, he opens our eyes, and challenges our views.

His writing is serious, open, warm, honest, often humorous and very easy to understand. There is no glossary but medical terms are explained in the text and there is an index to aid referencing. He uses real-life stories to demonstrate the points and engages his reader to think about the issues discussed. Each chapter flows seamlessly to the next, embedded within are helpful resources and information. It has an attractive cover with a gripping title that draws attention. There are no illustrations or photos but the general layout, typeface and size are easy on the eye. The tone is passionate, frank, open, honest and full of empathy. It is almost as if the author is taking the reader by the hand to walk through the minefield of the NHS, showing us how to get the best out of its services despite the imperfections.

The author's energy and passion for medicine are fully on display in this well-written book. He is a tremendously caring doctor, teacher and broadcaster with a genuine desire for better health care in the UK. He wrote this book at a crucial moment in the NHS, to help people navigate a complex and imperfect system. It is full of useful information with grains of wisdom and humour. It assures us that the NHS, despite its limitations and imperfection, is still one of the best health care systems in the world. It will help cancer patients have a meaningful dialogue with their medical professionals and take an active part in the management of their health care needs. It is not only a useful handbook, it is also educational; it broadens our understanding in dealing with health problems and challenges us to pursue a lifestyle so that we can enjoy life without medical intervention where possible. In addition, it equips us to participate in a meaningful discussion about the future of NHS. The Mid Staffordshire Hospital crisis was the watershed moment in the NHS and the government is now promising a seven-day hospital and GP service. Yesterday (29 July 2015), the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) warned that over-tired GPs will put patient safety at risk. Having read this book, one can now make a reasonable judgement as to whether the government's pledge for a seven-day service is more about pleasing the public than addressing the real issue: building an NHS that will last the test of time.

### **Breast cancer survivor (56-65) (July 2015)**

This book is for everyone – we can all find ourselves in need of some calm, sensible advice about our health or an apparent emergency. The author distinguishes clearly, carefully and safely between emergencies, occasions when the GP, a nurse or a pharmacist can help and those when one can manage without advice.

It is easy to understand; technical terms are explained and the tone is good. It is well-presented, larger than the usual paperback, on good quality paper, with lists but no illustrations. I didn't notice any errors other than a couple of proofreading ones.

I recommend it to anybody who might wish for some advice for their dealings with the NHS; it could be handy in preparing for a private consultation too. A copy would be useful in every home! However did we manage without it?

### **Living with breast cancer (Over 75) (July 2015)**

This book is suitable at any point during a health issue – diagnosis, treatment or after treatment. The many sections guide and coach the healthcare recipient in how to get the best from the NHS. There are ample examples of real-life experiences, where things didn't go to plan – many very sad, some very positive – that describe how the situation arose, how it was dealt with and what can be learnt to encourage others to learn and prepare for appointments, investigations, surgery, treatment and follow up.

I really like that it is written by someone with experience who has been practicing in the health service for many years. The examples in the book make it to real to life. I'm not sure how, but it would benefit from the inclusion of some colour and/or pictures. It's a very long book with fantastic advice but it took me a long time to read.

This book encourages you to think outside the box when it comes to treatment plans. There is useful advice on how to use NHS services and get the right department for your health needs. The descriptions of reflection and learning from many issues and situations are really useful. It is very good for self-motivation and gaining the feeling of self-help, that there is something you can do for yourself rather than sit back and do as the doctors say. It reassures that it is ok to question and get a second opinion. However, if you are unwell or undergoing treatment, it could be hard going and it would be beneficial if someone could read it for you. Friends and relatives could read it to be involved, use the advice, and find out how they can help. I have already recommended it to others.

### **Living with oligodendroglioma (26-35) (July 2015)**

This book is very wide ranging, even someone working in the NHS could learn from it! It will help care workers understand the patient viewpoint and the importance of services provided by other areas of the NHS and how they ought to be integrated into joined-up care. It is most useful for learning how to access NHS services and stand up for what you are entitled to, find someone to help you to do this if you are not well enough to do it for yourself, understand the treatment choices open to you, say no, and decide all aspects of care for yourself, should you wish to.

At first I hated it! This is because I wanted to find out something – fast! I wanted to know how to get information on dealing with NICE in relation to obtaining a drug that they need to commission. I am sure many people will want to find out something specific and it is hard to do that, despite the index. As it turns out, he does not really deal with this topic; this is a shame as I am sure many cancer patients experience the 'postcode lottery' of funding for an expensive drug and, if so, for how long.

The language is easy, the style down to earth and the tone personable – a very easy and humorous read, empathic and engrossing. The bold cover attracts attention, which it needs to! The pages are a good size and the print is large and clear.

I like how he admires the 'heroes' of illness, and praises those who have talked to him, helped him, or provided groundbreaking services or help to others. I like his willingness to admit that he has hardly ever been ill! It made me change some of my approaches to my own medical care – reading up more, asking more questions, saying 'no'. He asks the question a lot: 'What would it be like if I did nothing? What

would happen to my health if I took this route?' So often we are not given this choice. He made me think back over my own journey and see that several times I would have been better to do nothing; I knew this at the time but had not trusted my instinct. He reminded me of the value of a second opinion. He includes information about private health care, which made me re-evaluate some of my experiences in private hospitals, gave me a better understanding of why this should be and how an NHS hospital might have been better. I will definitely act differently from now on.

It needs to be longer or perhaps there should be a follow-up to cover the areas missed! For example, I would like to see a chapter on how to get support for the most vulnerable patients, e.g. those without a friend or relative to go with them to appointments, those who find it hard to attend appointments, those who may have problems managing their rehabilitation once home, and those for whom making difficult choices about treatment is further complicated by age or other disability.

As mentioned before, it is hard to navigate; it is written in memoir style rather than easy to access topics. Having said that, it fills a large gap in the cancer patient's bookshelf as it is written by an insider who can stick up for the NHS as well as be critical. He also shares a very personal story about illness in his family that gives the book a big dose of humanity, something factual books can lack. He talks about how things can change for the better, even with budget restraints and encourages people to take responsibility for themselves, if they can, and to put forward feedback and good ideas. He gave me a new set of criteria by which to judge my complaint about a recent hospital stay. Other patients give enormously wise lists of advice and support and he emphasises the importance of specialist charities like Macmillan.

I highly recommend it even though it did not do what I thought it would, i.e. follow through on the areas of most concern to patients with a serious illness – how to get expensive drugs or appropriate aftercare services. There is a bit about out-of-area referrals but not enough facts. His approach is a bit patchy! One area in which it does deliver is that of freedom of information and access to records; this can mean the difference between good care and bad, life and death, if an error is not spotted.

Things change fast in the world of healthcare and this book will need to be updated regularly. The five stars are for Phil himself and for his invaluable references to other resources, including the online tools now used by some specialists to predict things such as the likelihood of a recurrence of cancer, either with a particular treatment or without it; many of these resources can be used by the patient too.

### **Breast cancer patient (46-55) (June 2015)**

This book has nothing to do with cancer per se but is aimed at anyone who is, or becomes, unwell and as such it is a book for us all. It has two titles: "Staying alive"; and "How to get the best from the NHS". So only part of it deals with the NHS and none of it deals with cancer. The problems the NHS faces, financial and other, are made very apparent; some of the stories of where the NHS has gone wrong or made mistakes are worse than any horror tale. Curiously, the "Staying alive" part doesn't translate to any advice about good living, e.g. diet and exercise.

It is bigger than it needs to be and jumps around at random. I don't like the overuse of widely spaced and often repeating lists and many, largely pointless, acronyms. It underuses graphs, diagrams and references. Page 272 refers to some non-existent graphs. The author cites statistics throughout; some are surprising but nowhere does he cite the sources. He also refers to publications and websites throughout (the websites look very useful) but it would be better to list these altogether at the end.

The author suggests that doctors often support each other's diagnosis (p. 110); in my experience, this isn't always the case, they can often be contradictory. He suggests (p. 113) that doing nothing about a health condition is often better than seeking help; clearly not good advice if you have a cancer diagnosis. I don't like how on the ball he expects you to be, e.g. the need to be so internet savvy; many elderly people can't use the internet and many struggle to see a GP, yet he seems to think you can just pick and choose until you find a good one (p. 115).

I'm not sure it is a good read if you have recently received a life-changing diagnosis. There is enough to worry about without being made aware of all the things that might go wrong or indeed how on your toes you need to be. However, it is a must just to learn the tricks and shortcuts and how to go about things. There are some real gems and some heart-breaking stories. A curious dual thread runs throughout, the first being all NHS-related matters, the second not NHS related, and this gives it a unique appeal. All in all, it is better read when you're well, in preparation for when you're not.

### **Seminoma patient (46-55) (June 2015)**

This excellent book is useful for all aspects of cancer and other illnesses. It shows us how to ask questions in our quest for the right treatment. It covers topics in depth yet is essentially an understanding of the needs of all who use the NHS. It is easy to understand, giving us much knowledge in a straight and understandable way. It looks good and will appeal to anyone who wants to know more about their options

It is well set out, gives us clear options, and explains that we can decide how we want to have treatment. It is an essential guide for those of us who often just go along with what we are told, when we should ask questions. I have never been a confident person. Now that I have read this book, I feel able to ask questions to make my choices. We should all realise that it is our right to do so. If it had been available when I was first diagnosed, it would have helped me to understand that means were there to help me along. I hope that others will find it invaluable.

### **Living with breast cancer (66-75) (May 2015)**

This book will benefit anyone who uses the NHS although it may seem a bit too much to take in if you are struggling with a cancer diagnosis or having one of those bad days that we all experience. It is useful for communicating with GPs and hospital staff, speaking up if there are problems, giving praise where it's deserved, and working out the treatment you need and what treatments are not right for you. Much of its message is taken from patient experience, so the main themes are repeated as the author applies them to different patient circumstances.



It is easily accessible and light hearted. There are no technical words that are not explained. The author is a GP but uses the testimonies of patients to illustrate his points. The title is gripping and this is qualified by the additional statement, 'How to get the best from the NHS'. The text is easy to read with generous spacing and the cover is simple with the message in bold type. It is well indexed.

This is a no-nonsense book about staying healthy – whether you hope to avoid developing a chronic disease or whether you are managing one. It encourages patient empowerment and is a book that everyone should read. It's as much about avoiding becoming ill as about dealing with the NHS; if you have a chronic condition, you rely on it for the remainder of your life and importantly, if you are facing death, it shows how you might prepare and make it a good death. The patient contributions balance some emotional aspects of dealing with chronic disease but it is generally quite hard hitting and may not be suitable for people who are feeling vulnerable. I like the author's pragmatic good sense and honesty. A statement early on is thought provoking: 'The NHS does not always deliver your rights, just as patients don't always live up to their responsibilities'. The book justifies a partnership approach between patients and healthcare professions to get the best out of the NHS.

### **Ovarian cancer patient (56-65) (May 2015)**

We all use the NHS to a greater or lesser degree and this book is not solely about cancer, the messages and guidance apply to anyone. We could all benefit from reading it and taking action to avoid, or delay the onset of, serious illness, but principally patients should it as a manual, medical professionals should take note and act. For patients and carers, it is a survival manual with sensible tips on all aspects of a patient's journey. It starts with what we can do to keep away from the NHS or delay our use; each day you are not using the NHS, someone with a genuine need can.

It tackles two big issues and offers solutions. Firstly, an ageing population and the development of new solutions mean that, unchecked, the financial crisis in the NHS will worsen – a solution is in the hands of us all, not politicians. Secondly, it is a manual for getting through a diagnosis of serious illness. There is a prevailing sense of optimism; a problem is only a problem if there is no solution – this book delivers. Another strength is the inclusion of over 60 patient journeys. All journeys are different and of interest; that's no exception here and one is intensely moving, reducing me to tears. Another feature is the inclusion of many websites, transferring knowledge to the patient, allowing better informed decisions. I also particularly like his guidance on preparing for a meeting with your consultant and his use of acronyms e.g. CLANGERS, SCANS. The earlier you read this book, the better.

The author is an experienced writer and this is not a difficult read but the medical terminology means it's not a quick one; 300 pages is a lot to get through – it is not a skim read. The paper is typical trade quality, rather than the crisp white of a hardback, but ideal for jotting notes on. A white cover with a picture of a stethoscope and the title gives no doubt as to the subject matter. The cover carries a red circle with the message "this book could save your life"; indeed, it could – this is not mere marketing hype. There are no illustrations but it is not lacking for their absence.

The statistics quoted are huge: an annual spend of £110bn, 70% of that on chronic diseases; an ageing population; and a £30bn financial black hole in the next five years. Do nothing is not an option. The author argues that politicians will not deliver a solution but it is within the power of patients to do so and live better thereby. Delaying the onset of chronic disease, in some cases avoiding it at all, could save billions. I was pleased to find that I'd already adopted the recommendation of asking my local pharmacist about minor ailments instead of seeing my GP. This frees up time for my GP to see someone with a more serious problem and is more convenient for me. We could speak up when things go wrong – raising matters before they become more serious and expensive. No one has a monopoly on good ideas and your idea might only be a tiny improvement but replicated across the entire NHS...!

This is a seminal read, against which all other books on the NHS must be judged. It is a must read for anyone facing chronic illness, or for anyone using or planning to use the NHS, i.e. all of us. You will find it a highly relevant read with its guidance on asking the right questions, living well and understanding options. In the NHS, Britain has the finest health service in the world but it has big and growing financial problems. This book articulates a solution; us the patients. It's a real win-win solution. If it's good for me, it's good for the NHS.

**In remission for a Grade 4 glioblastoma multiforme brain tumour (56-65) (May 2015)**



This is a good reference book about how to get good treatment and what to ask, so best read at diagnosis. It starts with an overview of the NHS, continues through the "Living with..." sections and getting the right care to 'The right death for you'.

The cover illustrates what it is: a reference book with information. The language is not technical; it is written in plain English and is easy to understand. The tone is light but also serious where needed.

It is a very good factual book full of information, but there is so much information. The index at the back helps to find specific items. I like the facts, the information, and the section "Living with rust", which made me smile. There are too many life stories for me; they make the book too big. I prefer straight information and tend to skip the stories but they do help break up the solid content and the vast amount of NHS facts.

When I was diagnosed and looking for information, I needed short books and booklets – I was not in the right mental or emotional place to tackle a book on such a broad subject. However, I am very pleased now to have had the opportunity to read this comprehensive, useful book.

**Uterine cancer survivor (56-65) (October 2015)**

This book has a lot of information that you can dip in and out of. It could be a useful starting point for anyone and has the potential to help inform people about how the NHS works, from GP to hospital, birth to death. More importantly, it explains how essential it is to take responsibility for your own health and not to be afraid to challenge, chase up and push appointments and treatment; often people find this is difficult to do and worry that they may be perceived in a negative way. I also gained insight into the extent that hospitals should be sharing information and co-producing care plans for individuals with long-term conditions, which was useful.

There is a logical flow and the style makes it easy to read; the contents page and index give enough detail to enable you to find the relevant section. It is very easy to understand and the language is appropriate. The size of the typeface is good – I didn't need to resort to glasses. It is long but you don't need to read it from cover to cover; you can read just sections relevant to you. At times, I found the information a little repetitive, especially the references to websites; a list of these at the end would be useful, rather than have to go back to find them as required. However, I did learn about some useful websites, which I have subsequently used to gain information.

I enjoyed reading it and will come back to it, depending on where I am on my journey and what information I need. It helps you to begin to understand how the NHS works and how to help it work better for you. The inclusion of individual stories is useful and on occasions inspiring; it enabled me to relate the system (the NHS) to the individual. I like the honesty of the author in terms of the importance of taking control of your own medical care and not being afraid to challenge.

There is nothing that I dislike, but you may want to read it in chunks, reading the sections that are pertinent at the time. Beginning to understand a system can help you feel in control when diagnosis and treatment make you feel you are not.

### **Living with bowel cancer (46-55) (August 2015)**

This is a very useful book to have on the book shelf for looking up information and ensuring that you have all the information you need. It is very easy to understand. I like the layout and typeface and I found the index very useful. The only thing I don't like is that it is heavy to hold; this is why I didn't give it five stars!

### **Living after bowel cancer (66-75) (July 2015)**

Anyone in the UK would find this book useful. It is not specific to cancer, but will be useful for anyone to read to be able to advocate for correct treatment and care.

It is not well structured; 300+ pages of solid text are divided into five chapters, one of which is half of the book. To add to the confusion, Chapter 2 has the same title as the book. I'm not sure how the author intends it to be read other than cover to cover. There is an 18-page index so it may be possible to look for a subject. Generally, the language is straightforward with technical words explained in the text. A few words will be outside most people's vocabulary.

The cover is durable but the paper inside less so and the tight binding makes it difficult to read without bending the spine. The font of the main text is easier to read than that used for the patient stories; this was exacerbated by a ragged right margin. Because there are so many patient stories the tone of the author seems to vary.

I like the patient stories, despite their format, and the large amount of useful information on many health conditions. However, the presentation detracts from the excellent content and there seems to be a lot of repetition. The coining of acronyms such as CLANGER, SCAN and their subsequent use is immensely irritating. The author refers to many different websites by their organisation's name without giving the web address. Readers may have problems in finding the correct site.

Despite these criticisms, the content is very useful for dealing with the NHS and getting less harmful treatment. There is a great deal of very good advice for specific health conditions. I recommend it to the public for dealing with health issues.

### **Kidney cancer survivor (66-75) (July 2015)**

This book covers issues that every one of us can relate to and build knowledge on. It would be most useful at the time of displaying symptoms and can be an aid at any stage where extra knowledge can be helpful in manoeuvring effectively around the health system.

It is simple to understand and the best way to read it is to zone in on what is relevant at the time – that way it feels manageable. The topic is serious and the book has a medical look about it – mainly text with the changes in tone managed by using different fonts. The author's tone is very empowering and supported by case studies. At times the font is too small and the book can feel too long and wordy.

It is honest, upfront, and informative about diseases. It integrates various healthcare options, such as private care/charities, with the NHS and is up to date with the current form of health needs by referring to health care and social care as ONE. It uses patient experiences and a wide range of disease types as guidance for desired outcomes. It empowers patients to take more responsibility, be more proactive about their care, engage in research rather than rely on advice from professionals, and make choices based on a better understanding. It stresses the importance of self-management and establishing two-way communication by asking relevant questions and seeking a second opinion where necessary.

### **Living with the consequences of breast cancer (46-55) (July 2015)**

This book is aimed at anyone who uses the NHS, which is most people at some point during their life, but is especially helpful to those with chronic or long-term conditions who are trying to navigate their way around the service.

It's fairly easy to read – it is easy to pick out the parts that are of interest – and uses case histories and patient experiences to demonstrate strategies to help people help themselves. There is some repetition – the same advice is given several times – but

the sections within chapters and the bullet points make it fairly easy to negotiate. Technical terms are explained and it is written in a way that most people would understand. The cover gets your attention.

It is very good at informing patients about the standards they should expect from the NHS; the fact that it is written by a doctor adds weight to this. It is good practical advice on how to handle health professionals and the questions to ask. The case studies are helpful to demonstrate patient power and it tackles the taboo of death in a refreshingly straightforward way and uses gentle humour in some of the more difficult areas. Some of the advice could be daunting for less assertive patients, e.g. insisting on always seeing the same GP, asking for a chat with the practice manager, and could make them feel inadequate. The information on useful websites is good, although of little use if you are not computer literate. If acronyms are your thing there are lots of useful ones to help you remember the advice.

This book aims to empower patients to take an active part in their treatment and care; it encourages patients to question decisions constructively. It gives practical tips on what questions to ask in consultations. It also gives plenty of common-sense advice on how to stay healthy. It gives an honest assessment of what expectations a patient can have of the NHS and outlines the current challenges it faces. There is a lot of advice, which could prove a little overwhelming, but overall, it's good practical advice from someone who has worked in the system and knows it well.

It is useful for the patient who wants to be proactive in their care and treatment and gives patients confidence in their own abilities to make informed choices, but it could make some less proactive patients feel inadequate. There is advice on how to use new technologies in your treatment, one such being PKB (patient knows best), a collaborative Facebook-style website used by patient and hospital, but realistically this will be available only to a very small number of patients. However, on the upside at least it provides information on the existence of such systems! A good read those who want to be more informed about the NHS!

### **Breast cancer patient in remission for nine years (56-65) (July 2015)**

Not unreasonably, this deals largely with prevention and could be dispiriting for those who already have cancer. At times, it assumes that the NHS provides a seamless service; in my experience this is not always the case. However, it is useful for the inspirational case studies and getting the best out of the NHS. There are numerous points of reference and information. I learnt that dementia costs as much as cancer and heart conditions combined and that 1 in 2 people get cancer, of whom 1 in 3 die.

It is an excellent reference book. It would be more helpful if it had dedicated chapters (e.g. cancer, heart disease, dementia) and a demystification of hospice care. It is readable, but the sheer volume of data is daunting. It is crammed with acronyms and lists; they are excessive but some stick in the mind, e.g. C.L.A.N.G.E.R.S. and H.E.A.L.I.N.G. Some illustrations may have been helpful. I was appreciative of my oncologist who showed me the scan of my intestines, but personal views may vary.

Dr Hammond has great empathy with patients and does not confuse the reader with medical terminology. His ethos is based on a partnership between patient and doctor and his book is unstuffy and written with the patient at the heart of issues. My favourite quote is: "Life is not holding a good hand but playing a bad hand well". I like the emphasis on self-help and sharing knowledge with patients (medical records) and the ample details of online assistance. One of the things I learnt was to break issues down into manageable chunks, prioritise and action your strategy. Dr. Hammond's upfront profile may not be appreciated by more conservative elements of BMA.

This is an excellent analysis of how to maximise the benefits of the NHS, of which cancer is just a part. It is useful for those who crave answers and it is a mine of information. I might recommend it; it depends on where you are on the cancer journey. If your prognosis is poor, you may feel the advice is too late. For those at the start of the journey, or their carers, it is certainly worth reading. It should have special relevance for GPs; late diagnosis is too common, my cancer was detected at A&E. Not all doctors have Dr. Hammond's missionary zeal and not all patients have the strength to fight for a second opinion. This book may empower those not happy with their initial diagnosis.

### **Colon cancer survivor (66-75) (June 2015)**

This book, which is aimed at anyone using the NHS not just cancer patients, may be too much of a read for someone who wants advice only about cancer treatment. It will be useful for anyone who wants to know what their rights are in respect of the NHS, and how to get the right care. It also provides some useful website addresses for further information. It flows well and is very clearly written using appropriate language. It has a nice bright cover, and temptingly claims it could save your life.

I like that it's written by a doctor. I like the case studies, anecdotes, and the tips by patients. The bit about pharmacy delays (p. 172) rang true and I am sure it will for others. I like that it encourages patients to take control in their treatment and take an active role in decision making.

The author refers to a lot of websites but there is no list in the book; it would benefit from having these links in an appendix. He has also created a lot of acronyms for the lists he provides, which is a little off putting.

It is a very interesting book with a lot of good advice, but I'm not sure when someone might decide to buy it. A cancer diagnosis is so frightening for many people that a book that tells you how to get the best from the NHS is probably the last thing on your mind. However, it would be very useful if a close friend or relative could read it and summarise the relevant parts. That said, as a general resource it is very good. It emphasises being involved in decisions about your own treatment. I might recommend it but I would make it clear that it isn't aimed directly at cancer patients.

### **Living with incurable bowel cancer (46-55) (June 2015)**

A doctor on our side! Phil Hammond sets out the many pitfalls and problems that patients may, and probably will, meet. It is a good general book by a doctor from the inside who clearly explains the state of the NHS as he sees it. It is not especially about cancer but shows us the problems in the NHS and how to get the best treatment. It may appear slightly negative. For patients who want definitive answers from their doctors and to feel completely looked after, it may be an eye opener.

It is very well laid out, with clear divisions and good size print. There is no need for illustrations; the information is clearly accessible. It is very readable and informative in a chatty way. The author has worked for the NHS for 30 years and draws on this experience to inform the reader how the NHS works, its strengths and pitfalls, which is of course useful for the patient. I particularly like his explanations on interpreting medical statistics, for example, breast screening. So many news items give data that can be misunderstood; this goes a good way to demystifying the numbers.

The other big plus is how it explains to patients how to become empowered to help themselves, not just by lifestyle changes but by maximising use of the NHS facilities available in the best possible way within its limitations. There is a host of patient examples with comments; each underlines how important it is to take charge of what is happening to you and to follow through. The days of non-involvement of the patient and public are numbered; people need to know that they can have a big effect on their treatment pathways and not be afraid to do so. A very honest examination of the less-than-helpful approach some doctors still, unfortunately, maintain.

Some may find it scary and the idea of self empowerment may not appeal to them. However, the author does seek to explain that we should not be afraid of questioning; by getting involved in discussions with our doctor we will receive the best outcome. It is a fresh approach for understanding patient involvement in the NHS.

### **Breast cancer patient (56-65) (June 2015)**



This very detailed guide to getting the best health care out of the NHS is of use to anyone who uses the NHS or is going to use it. However, the structure makes it difficult to find what you're looking for and the book seems to be more of an essay than a guide. It is general enough in subject matter to be of interest to anyone engaging with the NHS and has detailed information about how to get referrals and specialist help. It is perhaps too broad in scope to be directly relevant to cancer care, but it certainly sets out clearly what the expectations from the NHS are.

One of the most important messages – "Be a chaser" (p. 113) – should be given more prominence, as the delay caused by the bureaucracy enshrined in the NHS can lead to more intervention and treatment if you have cancer. The final chapter (The right death for you) is only 19 pages long, nine of which are taken up by a personal account. This is disappointing as this key issue could have been given more gravitas and attention. Maybe this reflects the general scope of the book, but it is a lost opportunity to look at end-of-life care for cancer patients.

It is difficult to navigate, although a glance at the contents list suggests that there is a logical flow to it. However, the bulk of the information is in the third chapter (Getting the right care for you), which is poorly structured. The lack of clear structure in this pivotal chapter makes it hard to pick out relevant parts. Perhaps the book is too broad in scope, certainly with the current format. It is easy enough to follow in terms of language and technical content, but there is an odd mix of humour and anecdotes that doesn't sit well with the information about the NHS; this is consistent with the author's various career roles, but confusing for readers. The author has an irritating habit of quoting without citing the source or giving it a context; eg "These tips come from an audience in Harrogate" (p. 109) with no information about the event, the audience, or even the date. The random list of tips is helpful enough, but they are not grouped or commented on and don't fit with the rest of the section.

It is not an appealing book. It is full of very helpful information that is lost in the poor structure. This is a great pity. The widespread use of lengthy case histories and examples is useful but indicated only by a change of font. This makes it rather confusing to navigate – you're not quite sure who has said what or where this information comes from. The core of the book – the 172-page third chapter – is far too long and it is hard to extract the relevant bits if you are, for example, wondering how to get a second opinion, or what your rights are to see a specialist. Perhaps it should have been published as a larger, glossier book with illustrations and boxes for case histories or to emphasise the checklists or acronyms he has developed.

It is a realistic view of how the NHS works, and the challenges of managing a serious health issue such as cancer. Some parts are extremely useful, and would have helped me to understand the NHS better once I had my cancer diagnosis. However, the format is too dense and I wouldn't have had the energy or inclination to wade through it to find the relevant bits when I was first diagnosed. It's also not relevant enough for people affected by cancer, although it does have useful information on dealing with the NHS.

### **Living with stage 4 tonsil cancer (46-55) (August 2015)**

I was initially unclear what this book was about and questioned how relevant it would be for me; I persevered and it proved to be a worthwhile investment of my time. I read it from start to finish but it could be read more selectively, using the contents page to locate relevant advice. It is written in an easily digestible language; no knowledge of medical terminology is assumed.

It will encourage patients and carers (not exclusively those affected by cancer), to be more inquisitive and vocal about their care. It has useful advice about preparing for consultations – being clear on what you want from them and articulating your main concerns. It is a useful read for someone affected by a long-term illness but also has (some) relevance for all users of the NHS. It may be helpful for people with family members who are not getting satisfactory care as inpatients – it gives some useful suggestions on how to escalate concerns and issues. Chapters 1 and 2 provide good context, thereafter I'd recommend readers consult the contents page to determine which sections are relevant to their circumstances.



I was drawn to this book in the hope of some suggestions of ways to regain control from the unfamiliar territory of being diagnosed with a long-term illness. As someone keen to take whatever steps I can to try to keep my condition managed, I hadn't previously given thought to what role I was taking in my treatment plan. Chapter 1 includes some stark reminders about the scale and extent of the NHS – recognising it doesn't just encompass treatment but its other roles around assurance, rehabilitation, information and compassion. It is a good portrayal of the complexity of the NHS and the pressure on resources emphasises the need for the public to take steps to maximise the deployment of available resources.

The author demonstrates the role people need to take in helping to 'join up' the NHS and to be prepared to assist with updating health professionals on other NHS interactions. He encourages people to be 'active' when offered tests and/or treatment – to ask probing questions to ascertain the likely benefit and explore other options such as doing nothing. It includes some good questions to ask doctors, particularly during the investigative stages of symptoms. The 'Living with relish' section of Chapter 2 is particularly good – some pointers to attaining a healthy and positive outlook. I didn't find the CLANGERS acronym that intuitive but I could fully relate to the underlying concept.

Kate Granger's #hellomynameis campaign is particularly interesting; it highlights how the way health professionals interact with patients can dramatically impact the patient experience and provides some useful pointers around how to take a more active role in your care.

It is slightly concerning to read how doctors can differ in terms of what they think is the best course of action. The loss of control and certainty brought about by my cancer diagnosis continues to be one of the big challenges for me, hearing how doctors can disagree about the best course of action is concerning because I perceive them to be a voice of authority in making my treatment decisions.

### **Living with ovarian cancer (36-45) (July 2015)**

This book deals with many long-term conditions, not just cancer. It could be read by anyone who needs to know how the NHS works and how patients can deal better with the often confusing and emotionally draining issues that a diagnosis can bring up. Initially it is very readable, but midway through I realised that most chapters advocate the same advice, interspersed with case studies that deal with different long-term illnesses; these make each chapter a bit different, but the advice on how to deal with the NHS is similar. I found myself speed reading towards the end.

It is generally easy to understand but there is no glossary. The author makes great use of websites that may give pertinent information but there is no list of these anywhere and I had to re-read chapters to find them again, which was rather annoying. It would be better if they were listed at the end with a short explanation of their relevance.

The cover is sharp and would certainly catch your attention if displayed on a forward-facing shelf. However, the typeface took some time to get used to and the typeface

for the case studies and lists is not the most readable. The tone is informative without being condescending, and any reader would be aware that the author is conversant with the different aspects of the NHS.

The author seems to believe that every patient is now given a personal plan, detailing their condition and treatment. In some areas, a care plan is not yet available to every patient; the NHS is working towards this, but it may take time. Although his suggestions of how to get more involved in your own care are good, in my case it was almost impossible to carry out. The NHS is not geared to patients asking to be involved in MDT meetings, for example. Such involvement is still some way off. Most staff are too busy and while they appreciate that more personal patient involvement is good, it is not a necessity in most hospitals where I have been a patient.

It gives lots of advice, but the NHS is not ready for the involvement required to give each patient the time and space to help themselves. It takes a confident patient to insist on being given more time with health care professionals, and I look forward to the day when patients who read this book, take the advice on board and bombard the NHS with their requests! If this book enables that, it is a worthwhile project.

### **Living with bowel cancer (66-75) (July 2015)**

This may be useful for those who are dissatisfied and unsure if they are getting the best treatment and care under the NHS but I am not sure if it would be suitable for someone recently diagnosed. I certainly was not in a fit state to be as proactive then as Dr Hammond advocates. I found some aspects rather depressing, for instance, the onus on the patient to fight for the best possible treatment at all times.

It appears to be written from the heart by someone who really cares about the NHS. The writer adopts a down-to-earth, compassionate approach and frequently uses real-life stories and examples. It is a little dense at times though the language is easily understandable. It is presented well with a comprehensive index.

The approach recommended requires a great deal of effort from the patient to get the best and most appropriate treatment and care. This may be unrealistic for someone recently diagnosed with a complex, serious illness. For this reason, the book would be of more use to a relative or supporter, NHS employee, or even politicians and decision makers to understand the failings in the NHS.

The author appears to suggest that the patient's chances of getting the best care depend upon their ability to ask the right questions of the right people at the right time. Because of that the book could be seen as a tool to assist the educated, assertive, articulate middle classes to navigate and manipulate the NHS. For those less able, the advice seems to be stay well at all costs, otherwise don't bother your busy GP and consider ignoring your symptoms – they might just clear up!

### **Breast cancer patient (66-75) (May 2015)**

This is not just about cancer but covers most critical illnesses. It may be useful for someone who has just been diagnosed. It is very factual and there are some very interesting facts about other diseases. The section on "getting the right care for you" is probably the most helpful, it explains drug treatments, the risks and benefits, getting to see the right consultant and having the right hospital care.

It doesn't flow well. Sometimes the language is not appropriate for the reader and there is no glossary. I didn't find it appealing. The typeface changes for patient stories, probably to differentiate them from the text, but it is hard to read.

It probably isn't the best book for cancer patients; although it has a few cancer examples it is more generalised on critical illnesses. It seems to be a collection of stories from patients and relatives about experiences in the NHS (some of them very moving). It would have been better for Dr Hammond to use his experience and knowledge to explain how to get the best from the NHS. I am not sure that a collection of patient experiences tells you how to do this.

### **Breast cancer patient (2004) (56-65) (May 2015)**



This is not a great read for someone with cancer. There are too many topics before you get to cancer issues. It is easy to understand but it took me a long time to get into and I found myself skipping pages. It's not an easy read, quite dull and not inspiring. It's not the most attractive book and not one I would pick up to read. There are no pictures and it looks quite bland.

I enjoyed the stories of people's experiences on the cancer journey, how they were treated by health care professionals but I would not recommend this to my local cancer support group. It might be useful for the public but cancer patients and their carers want information that's quick and easy to read. This is too intense and not very helpful. It's quite negative in some respects and I did not enjoy reading it.

### **Living with breast cancer (56-65) (May 2015)**



This book is over 300 pages long. I was bored after 100 and at the end felt even more bored. I could not use it as a reference book nor could I recall sections to confirm my experiences or the path I should take in any specific situation. It does not present a good, clear picture mainly because the author tells the same story repeatedly. It is also full of patient experiences as if to prove that what the author is saying has some validity. As these examples are of unknown quality they are of no support to the doubtful. Definitely a no-no!

### **Living with prostate cancer (Over 75) (August 2015)**

This book provides a one-stop shop for information that is easy to find in other formats. It provides some interesting case studies, which readers may find helpful or distressing depending on their background and experience. It is not especially helpful for those living with cancer as it is a more generalist text covering many aspect of health care provision or its lack.

With only five main chapters the book has a logical approach. Once the reader has a grip on the contents, the structure will allow for dipping in and out as required at different times. It is a helpful reference to fall back on. The language is clear and understandable for the target audience but the paper is cheap and easily torn – not a good overall impression.

Personally, I did not like this book and would think very carefully about spending £15 on it. Because of the range of issues covered, it fails to provide sufficiently detailed advice and guidance and much of the information is already available on specialist websites. The only redeeming feature is the many different examples/case studies; these point readers at further information from specialist providers/support agencies.

You can find better resources elsewhere and more cheaply. I recommend using specialist resources and support organisations to obtain more helpful information.

**Cancer survivor (66-75) (July 2015)**

# Further information

## Why does Macmillan Cancer Support review books?

We use reviews to help us compile a list of suggested cancer books, the [Macmillan Core Book List](#). Cancer information centres and public libraries can use this list to select appropriate and relevant books for people affected by cancer.

We add reviews to the [Directory of information materials for people affected by cancer](#) so that people affected by cancer can see what others in a similar situation think about a book. You can also see details of all the books reviewed in the [Book reviews listing](#), which also has links to all the reviews.

We recruit most of our reviewers through the [Volunteering Village](#) and the [Cancer Voices Network](#), people affected by cancer who have signed up to help Macmillan Cancer Support in a number of ways. Volunteers are a vital part of our book review process; since 2007, over 1,500 Macmillan volunteers have written more than 6,000 reviews of over 500 different books.

If you are a health professional who would like to review books for us, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

## Information and support for people affected by cancer

If you are looking for support to help you live life with cancer, you may wish to contact one of [Macmillan's cancer information and support services](#). Or you can call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00** (Mon-Fri 9am–8pm). We have an interpreting service in over 200 languages. Just state, in English, the language you wish to use. If you are deaf or hard of hearing you can use textphone no 0808 808 0121 or Text Relay.

You can also email us using the [website enquiry form](#). Alternatively, [visit our website](#).

## Feedback

If you have any comments, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

**Being told ‘you have cancer’ can affect so much more than your health – it can also affect your family, your job, even your ability to pay the bills. But you’re still you. We get that. And, after over 100 years of helping people through cancer, we get what’s most important: that you’re treated as a person, not just a patient.**

**It’s why we’ll take the time to understand you and all that matters to you, so we can help you get the support you need to take care of your health, protect your personal relationships and deal with money and work worries.**

**We’re here to help you find your best way through from the moment of diagnosis, so you’re able to live life as fully as you can. For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00 or visit [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)**

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