

## Book Review

### ***Healthy Aging: A Lifelong Guide to Your Physical and Spiritual Well-Being***

**Andrew Weil, M.D.**

**Toronto: Random House, 2005, 358 pp.**

**ISBN 978-0-307-27754-1**

**Reviewed by Elaine M. Gallagher**

It was with scepticism that I approached the task of reviewing a book on aging by a physician who is known to be a regular guest on such television programs as *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Dr. Phil*. Not that the guests on these shows do not have valuable ideas to share, but pop culture today is full of myths and fantasies about what one can do to prevent the very natural process of aging. Many of the preachers are motivated by market incentives of various types, and it can be difficult to separate the proven remedies from the ones that are based on poor or minimal research.

At first glance, Dr. Weil appeared to hold more credence than many writers who claim special knowledge or wisdom on various topics. With undergraduate and medical degrees from Harvard, he is the founder and Director of the Program in Integrative Medicine at the College of Medicine, University of Arizona, where he also holds the positions of Clinical Professor of Medicine, Professor of Public Health, and Lovell-Jones Professor of Integrative Rheumatology. I was inspired to continue reading.

*Healthy Aging* is one of 10 books authored by Dr. Weil on a variety of subjects based on his beliefs and research findings concerning our ability to improve our minds, bodies, and spirits in natural, holistic ways. The focus of this book is the later stages of life. The key messages stem from his premise that it is never too early or too late to start caring for your body, and that does not mean plastic surgery, Botox, expensive face creams, or medications of various sorts. This “Dr.” has a new set of “prescriptions,” including:

- get regular exercise
- enjoy better sleep
- prevent flu and cold infections
- learn to eat well (an anti-inflammatory diet is outlined in detail) and choose proven dietary supplements

- live with altered sexuality and other stresses in healthy and creative ways
- have regular screening checks and treat precursors to illness (like hypertension or hyperglycemia) early
- maintain healthy mental, social, and intellectual patterns

Now, this is not rocket science and it is information that many nurses know intuitively and in fact are taught in health promotion classes as part of undergraduate curricula. However, the scientific backing for many of these ideas has been beautifully woven throughout the book in an informative yet easily understood way. Thus the book reads less like a textbook for a course and more like something you would want to keep by your bedside for inspiration and guidance. It is a book to give as a gift to one's aging parents, a book to recommend to the girls' book club, a book to use as a reference for those nursing courses.

Perhaps Dr. Weil's most compelling message is around the notion of embracing one's aging, recognizing the normality of many of the changes one undergoes and not trying to stop or interfere with the process. Dr. Weil suggests we "use the experience of aging as a stimulus for spiritual awakening and growth." He also recommends journaling one's encounter with aging and sharing the knowledge one has gained with others one cares about.

Some may find that he stretches his analogies somewhat by providing detailed descriptions of the values of aged whisky, wine, cheese, beef, violins, and antiques. So be it. I found that aspect of his book refreshing, although as I near that magic age of 65 myself, I think I want to be thought of more as "graceful swan" than as ancient chest of drawers. That aside, the book will appeal to many readers, particularly health practitioners of all backgrounds. While respecting the role that genetics and the environment play in determining our life course, *Health Aging* provides guidance on those elements of our aging that we can control — our lifestyle. It includes practical tips on how to carry out the recommended lifestyle changes as well as additional reading and resources to assist one in making those changes. I will read this book again.

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*Elaine M. Gallagher, RN, PhD, is Director, Centre on Aging, University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.*