(A Short and Happy Guide to) Elder Law

The 154 page book “A Short and Happy Guide to Elder Law”, by Kenney Hegland and Robert Fleming was published in 2009. Hegland is a Professor Emeritus of Law at the University of Arizona (and a member of UARA). Fleming is an Elder Law Specialist and Pima County Fiduciary in Tucson, Arizona.

There are 33 brief and clearly written chapters organized into eight parts: 1) some basics, 2) advice for all seasons, no role 3) daily troubles: getting in and out, 4) caring for others, 5) disability and dementia, 6) finances, Medical Care, and housing, 7) estate planning, and 8) and dying - the details. The book is written clearly, as anecdotes and examples, and is presented with a good sense of humor. The book came about when the two authors ask themselves following question: "what are the problems seniors and their families are likely to face and how can they use law to solve them?"

The book points out the importance of having a conversation with seniors, finding out what they would like to accomplish and if there are problems what are the alternatives. It is important to get the perspective of the senior directly without going through relatives, and ensure that any legal advice is understood by the senior (as well as by their relatives).

The book presents a brief and understandable "legal checkup" or the types of documents are not only listed but given in the context of what they mean and why it is useful to the senior. Some examples include: medical issues and financial decisions, as well as the importance of talking with family members and understanding just what quality of life means. One chapter is titled "confronting the elephant" – the importance of being clear to your relatives just what you would like for a final care or medical treatment. This doesn't have to be as short as a simple checklist but something that that might have some descriptions for what you would really like, such as "I can live without walking but I don't want to live if I can no longer appreciate family and friends and could no longer understand the world around me.” That these types of questions suggest the importance of the madding appropriate estate planning completed before the last minute.

The book also addresses practical matters such as how to make a household safe, dealing with grandchildren, divorce, or remarriage, discrimination in housing, dealing with doctors, and abuse and how to recognize yet - either physical are financial. Some common errors or provided, regardless who makes them (doctors, family members, or the senior in question). Abuse and scams are something that everyone needs to be aware of as well as any resulting neglect or exploitation. Having some knowledge about early symptoms is critical in preparing future caregivers.

Finally, there are several sections that come under the category of care and making decisions for others. The better the support people go the senior, the better they will be able to assist the senior in making decisions or have to make decisions for them. What are the options for nursing homes and geriatric care managers or guardianships? What rights do you maintain or give up under these conditions? How you deal with the multiple agencies or companies involved in care - such as social security and Medicare, care facilities, an everyday things such as providing appropriate medicine or balancing the checkbook.

Reviewed by Roger Caldwell