



Hindsight: What We Wish We'd Known at the Onset of Our Daughter's Sudden Descent into Anorexia (Volume 1)

Mrs. Lyn Ellis

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Our daughter experienced a sudden and very dramatic onset of the mental disorder known as anorexia nervosa: She became like another person almost overnight, and then lost 30% of her body weight in three months. Shocked and horrified, we responded just as feverishly -- scouring the Internet for resources, reading every book and article we could find, attending parent support groups, and seeking advice from experts. Unfortunately, our desperate efforts couldn't keep pace with her illness, and many decisions had to be made before we fully understood or knew how to deal with it. Those decisions included: Do we allow her to return to college (the week following what we experienced as perhaps a psychotic break)? If so, how do we make sure she'll be safe? What kind of treatment team do we assemble? What level of treatment, and which facilities should we have her attend? We were under siege before we even knew war had been declared. We repeatedly found ourselves reeling from its effects before we could gather and assimilate enough information -- i.e., the right information -- and certainly before we grasped the complexity of this new and terrifying terrain. Unfortunately, the myriad decisions forced upon us became intractable. We ended up with teams that didn't act as aggressively as we wanted them to, and when we pressed them for information about their treatment rationale, we were treated as if we had caused her illness or were at least perpetuating it. We ended up with many caregivers who promised to not let our daughter fall through the proverbial crack, but then did exactly that, repeatedly. Knowing that anorexia is an illness in which swift and aggressive treatment ensures a better chance of recovery, we now wonder if choices made by those early caregivers caused her unnecessarily prolonged agony. Did their decisions -- made in part because we didn't know enough to ask the right questions -- cause her anorexia to take hold in a way from which she may never fully recover? For parents who find themselves in a similar situation, this book provides (1) the most important things to know about the illness, (2) a historical context regarding the way anorexia has been viewed, (3) an explanation of the enormous (and dangerous) divide that exists between current research and many treatment strategies, and (4) practical information to help avoid or mitigate the inevitable pitfalls.

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