

FROM COMPASSION & CHOICES

# FINISH STRONG

Putting Your Priorities First at Life's End  
SECOND EDITION

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Race and Culture Matter Chapter Added to SECOND EDITION of FINISH STRONG

### Former ER & ICU Nurse/Physician Assistant Tells How to Take Charge of Your End-of-Life Care and Avoid Needless Suffering

(Portland, Ore. - Oct. 3, 2022) An ER and ICU nurse and physician assistant for 25 years, Barbara Coombs Lee, has added a new chapter about how “Race and Culture Matter” to the second edition to her [critically acclaimed, groundbreaking book: FINISH STRONG: PUTTING YOUR PRIORITIES FIRST AT LIFE'S END.](#)

The Second Edition of Finish Strong also includes an Afterword by Kim Callinan, Ms. Coombs Lee's successor as [Compassion & Choices president and CEO](#). With their vision and perspective, Callinan and Coombs Lee invite readers into the work of social change to assist not only themselves and their families but the greater community. In addition, since Ms. Coombs Lee has received many requests for an index, the second edition includes this feature, increasing the value of the book as a practical resource.

The book, originally published in January 2019, is based on Lee's decades as a clinician, caring for dying patients who suffered needlessly, and decades more as an advocate, empowering people to avoid that fate. Its recommendations come with both the authority of knowledge and experience, and the compassion of one who knows firsthand how challenging the end-of-life journey can be. **Finish Strong** is available for purchase now on eBook via Amazon, KDP paperback and hardcover via Amazon, and paperback and hardcover via IngramSpark.



CONTINUES

“...a strained healthcare system during the pandemic brought new awareness and new urgency to rectifying inequalities in healthcare,” writes Coombs Lee in “Race and Culture Matter,” the new chapter in the Second Edition of ***Finish Strong***. “A growing number of [hospices are launching or investing more resources in diversity initiatives](#). Adding incentives to increase the number of people of color who pursue careers in healthcare is also important. Post-graduate education for medical practitioners increasingly includes training to compensate for their inherent bias and build cultural sensitivity.”

[Coombs Lee](#), an attorney who co-authored the nation’s first law authorizing medical aid in dying, [which took effect 25 years ago this month](#), has worked for more than 50 years in healthcare as a clinician, policymaker, and advocate. Under her leadership, Compassion & Choices successfully led and supported legal and legislative campaigns to authorize medical aid in dying as an option for terminally ill adults to end their suffering peacefully in Washington, D.C., and six states: California, Colorado, Montana, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington.

Since Kim Callinan succeeded her as president and CEO of Compassion & Choices in 2018, four more states have enacted medical aid-in-dying laws: Hawai‘i, Maine, New Jersey, and New Mexico.

“My father-in-law...a prominent African American leader in Baton Rouge, Louisiana ... was able to avoid medical overtreatment and die on his own terms,” writes Callinan in the Afterword section of the book. “In a system too often void of compassion and too frequently filled with suffering, he was an exception. My goal, and hopefully yours too, is to change the way medicine is delivered so that all people, regardless of their race, sexual orientation, gender identity, or geography, can ***‘Finish Strong.’***”

The book has received [rave reviews](#) from numerous respected thought leaders, ranging from **Jeanne Phillips, nationally syndicated “Dear Abby” advice columnist** to spiritual icon **Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu**; **NPR radio show host Diane Rehm, author of *On My Own***; and former **NBC correspondent Betty Rollin, author of *Last Wish* and *First, You Cry***.

“A movement is afoot in end-of-life medical care, but doctors are not its leaders ... this book is the field manual to turn wilderness exploration into a rewarding adventure.”

— **Haider Warraich, M.D.**

**Foreword excerpt for *Finish Strong***

**Author of *Modern Death: How Medicine Changed the End of Life***

“There is no more authoritative or informed individual than Barbara Coombs Lee to lead us in the battle for a peaceful and dignified end-of-life journey.”

— **Diane Rehm, former host and executive producer of NPR syndicated *The Diane Rehm Show***

**Author of *On My Own***

“*Finish Strong* is the clarion call for the end-of-life choice movement just as *Our Bodies, Ourselves* was for the women’s movement.”

— **Jeanne Phillips, nationally syndicated “Dear Abby” advice columnist**

“As a society, we need to acknowledge that a positive dying experience should not be left to chance. Barbara shows that it is not something to fear; instead, it’s something we should revere.”

— **Dan Diaz, husband of the late Brittany Maynard, advocate for end-of-life care options**

“*Finish Strong* serves as a ‘field manual’ for exploration of autonomy and self-determination in healthcare during the closing years of life.”

— **Gov. Barbara Roberts, Oregon Governor 1991–95**  
**Author of *Death Without Denial, Grief Without Apology***

“Adults have the right to decide their own course of treatment at the end of life. Barbara Coombs Lee’s wise and compassionate book shows how best to do that.”

— **Betty Rollin, author of *Last Wish* and *First, You Cry***

“Barbara Coombs Lee’s new book *Finish Strong* will help people who want to pass the gift of life back into the hands of their God thankfully and with dignity. It is a blessing.”

— **Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu**

***Finish Strong*** is for those of us who want an end-of-life experience to match the life we’ve enjoyed — defined by love, purpose, and agency. We know we should prepare but are unsure how to think and talk about it, how to live true to our values and priorities as vigor wanes, and how to make our wishes stick, even if we can’t lift a finger to make it so. The usual advice about advance directives and conversations is important but woefully inadequate. This book describes concrete action in the here and now to help us live our best lives to the end. The empowering ***Finish Strong*** will guide you through:

- » Finding a partner doctor well-suited to your values and beliefs and who exhibits humanity, deference, and frankness.
- » Staying off the “overtreatment conveyor belt.”
- » Identifying what matters most as advancing illness takes its toll and defining your priorities.
- » Having meaningful conversations with doctors and family about expectations and wishes for life’s last precious months.
- » Knowing when “slow medicine” is the best option to maintain quality of life.
- » Navigating home hospice is the ultimate healing experience.

Written with candor and clarity, this book’s stories, facts, and dialogue will help prepare for later days that retain the purpose, grace, and dignity you’ve always valued. It can help you ***Finish Strong***.

Compassion & Choices is the oldest, largest and most active nonprofit working to improve care and expand options for the end of life in the United States, with 450,000 supporters nationwide. For more information, visit [CompassionAndChoices.org](http://CompassionAndChoices.org).

 **compassion  
& choices**  
Care and Choice at the End of Life

PRAISE FOR

# FINISH STRONG

Putting Your Priorities First at Life's End  
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Barbara Coombs Lee

“There is no more authoritative or informed individual than Barbara Coombs Lee to lead us in the battle for a peaceful and dignified end-of-life journey. She has been at the forefront since she helped draft the nation’s first medical-aid-in-dying law in Oregon. She covers all the issues we must address — from opening the conversations with our families to informing doctors about the kind of care we want at the end of our lives. Read *Finish Strong* and use it as a guide to consider your own final decisions.”

– Diane Rehm, former host and executive producer of *The Diane Rehm Show*, and author of *On My Own*

“Barbara Coombs Lee gives much-needed guidance on how we can keep our priorities straight as illness advances, helping us approach the end of life without inadvertently getting on a conveyor belt of tests, treatments and misery. *Finish Strong* serves as a ‘field manual’ for exploration of autonomy and self-determination in healthcare during the closing years of life.”

– Gov. Barbara Roberts, Oregon Governor 1991-95 and author of *Death Without Denial*, *Grief Without Apology*

“*Finish Strong* is a game-changing, paradigm-shifting work that will define an inflection point in the way our country thinks about and cares for people who are dying.”

– David Muller, M.D.,  
Dean for Medical Education,  
Icahn School of Medicine  
at Mount Sinai in New York

“Barbara Coombs Lee’s new book *Finish Strong* will help people who want to pass the gift of life back into the hands of their God thankfully and with dignity. It is a blessing.”

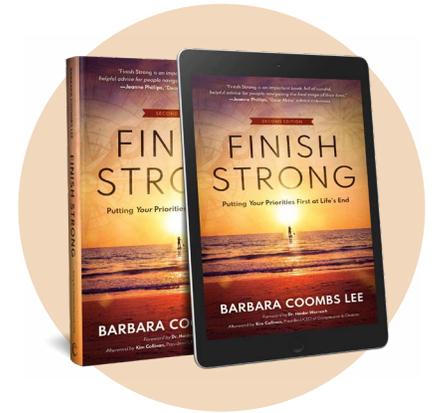
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“Adults have the right to decide their own course of treatment at the end of life. Barbara Coombs Lee’s wise and compassionate book shows how best to do that.”

– Betty Rollin, author of  
*Last Wish* and *First, You Cry*

“*Finish Strong* includes beautiful and powerful stories of people facing the end of life in so many different but strong ways.”

– Reverend Alexa Fraser,  
Unitarian Universalist  
Congregation of Sterling, Virginia



“Barbara Coombs Lee’s accounts of experiencing a good death in *Finish Strong* include the story of my wife, Brittany Maynard. Brittany’s determination to have control over her life’s end was possible because of Barbara’s advocacy for patients’ autonomy and her determination to challenge misguided norms.”

“As a society, we need to acknowledge that a positive dying experience should not be left to chance. Barbara shows that it is not something to fear; instead, it’s something we should revere. Experiencing a good death is merely the conclusion of a good life.”

– Dan Diaz, devoted husband of Brittany Maynard, and advocate for end-of-life options



Q&A WITH AUTHOR OF

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Barbara Coombs Lee

**“How can a person escape dementia?” and other questions for Barbara Coombs Lee, author of *Finish Strong: Putting Your Priorities First at Life's End, second edition* and President Emerita/Senior Advisor of Compassion & Choices**

*For more than five decades, Barbara Coombs Lee has worked in healthcare as a clinician, policymaker and advocate. Her indelible experiences as an ER and ICU nurse and physician assistant at the bedside of dying people forged a deep respect for individual values and beliefs, and eventually led her to a career in law and health policy. Barbara's work in public policy culminated in her becoming the first leader of Compassion & Choices, the nation's oldest and largest organization working to empower everyone to chart their end-of-life journey. Thousands of personal experiences and the teachings of scholars and thought leaders around the globe inform her perspective. She is a seasoned writer, speaker and commentator.*

*As someone with both an inside and outside view of the modern American medical world, Barbara's passion for transforming the end-of-life experience — by informing and empowering patients — infuses the second edition of her book, *Finish Strong: Putting Your Priorities First at Life's End*. She calls for all Americans to join a patient-driven movement to dismantle the institutional and cultural barriers to living well to the very end.*

**How is *Finish Strong* different from other books that cover “aging in America”?**

**Barbara Coombs Lee:** *Finish Strong* deals candidly with issues and experiences that other books covering aging avoid. It addresses fears and discusses ideas still often considered taboo.

Many journalists, doctors, bereaved spouses/adult children and even patients themselves, shocked or moved by their experience and newfound knowledge, are writing about America's dysfunction in end-of-life care. Each of those books arises from its authors' experiences. Each contributes to our national dialogue.

But up until now, no book has come with *Finish Strong's* unique combination of 50+ years of firsthand experience in nursing, medicine, law, public policy and advocacy behind it to support its conclusions. This second edition of *Finish Strong* features valuable new material, including a new chapter called “Race and Culture Matter;” an Afterword by Kim Callinan, the President/CEO of Compassion & Choices; and a detailed index for the book. What distinguishes *Finish Strong* from other books is its abiding philosophy of individual autonomy and passionate conviction that individuals can be empowered to chart a course for themselves — and loved ones — that reduces suffering and reflects their personal values and beliefs.

## What does the title “Finish Strong” signify to you?

**Barbara Coombs Lee:** “Finish Strong” means we can be true to our priorities in life even as we near its end. We can stay strong, and resist a conveyor belt of futile tests and treatments that can steal precious time and diminish the quality of life.

Finishing strong will be different for different people. Upon learning they are nearing the end of life, some will examine their options carefully and decide to dedicate their final months to experimental and taxing treatment. Others may decide to spend precious energy focused on passing life lessons and values on to their heirs. But for those who choose to “finish strong,” the common thread will be a certain strength in knowing that treatment decisions were well-considered, and they honored the values and beliefs that gave meaning to the life that is ending.

## What led you to write this book?

**Barbara Coombs Lee:** Americans’ blind faith in medical authority, the common idea that doctors know best which tests and treatments we need, is about to undergo a sea change. The purpose of this book is to help people navigate and implement that change.

Though my political and legal work have differed from my clinical work in nearly every way, they resemble it in one respect: They offered intimate dialogue with people in the final stages of their lives. And so it would seem — although I never set out to do so — that I’ve made a lifetime study of how Americans die.

And the truth is that dying in America is a terrible mess. So, in essence, *Finish Strong* is my invitation to readers to join the movement for autonomy over how we live as we age.

## What touchy topics does *Finish Strong* address?

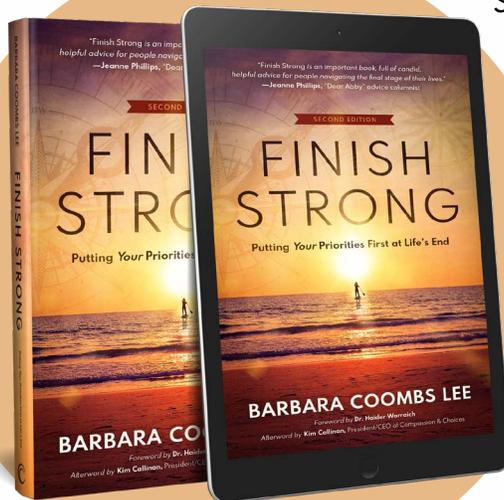
**Barbara Coombs Lee:** In addition to the question of how a person might escape advancing dementia with an intentional death (watch video answer at <https://youtu.be/sM9X8udCJMo>), *Finish Strong* discusses all available end-of-life options as a person transitions from treatments that attempt to cure, to treatments aimed at comfort and peace of mind. Experimental treatments, slow medicine, forgoing life-extending intervention, voluntarily stopping eating and drinking (VSED) and medical aid in dying are all here, and none are presented as better or worse than any other. This is an open-minded and nonjudgmental book.

It gives you the inside scoop on hospice care, advance directives, DNRs, doctor-patient relationships and what people really face at the end of life. It discusses frankly the roles of technology and religion in the context of the modern dying experience in America. And it offers alternative ways to bring sacred rituals and narratives into your last days to offer meaning and closure to you and your loved ones as you plan your life’s end.

Most importantly, this book candidly answers the questions you may have about the mysterious world of dying and anticipates questions you might not even know to ask. I have seen it all, from many vantage points, and my goal is to share what I know with you so you are empowered to craft the end-of-life experience you want and deserve.

## What is the one thing that you hope people take from *Finish Strong*?

**Barbara Coombs Lee:** I hope readers come away with a sense of their own authority — feeling empowered to ask questions, test assumptions and decide on a course of treatment that honors the character and meaning of their lives.



Find out more about Barbara Coombs Lee and *Finish Strong* at [FinishStrongTheBook.com](http://FinishStrongTheBook.com)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF

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Barbara Coombs Lee

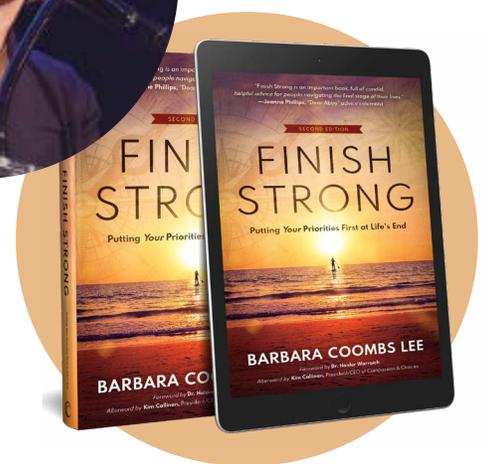
**BARBARA COOMBS LEE** worked in healthcare as a clinician, policymaker and advocate for more than five decades. Her indelible bedside experiences forged a deep respect for individual values and beliefs and eventually led her to a career in law and health policy. For the past 25 years she has advocated for initiatives that allow individuals a full range of options and much greater agency in their healthcare decisions.

Barbara's work in public policy culminated in her role as chief executive officer and president of Compassion & Choices, the nation's oldest and largest organization working to empower everyone to chart their end-of-life journey. After serving in that capacity for 22 years, Barbara transitioned her role to President Emerita/Senior Advisor.

Thousands of personal experiences and the teachings of scholars and thought leaders around the globe inform her perspective. Often quoted in the media, Barbara is a seasoned writer, speaker and commentator. Her previous book was *Compassion in Dying: Stories of Dignity and Choice*.

Barbara's passion for transforming the end-of-life experience by informing and empowering patients infuses ***Finish Strong***. She calls for all Americans to join a patient-driven movement to dismantle the institutional and cultural barriers to living well to the very end.

She lives in Oregon.



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