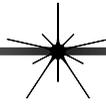


End of Life Issues



Photo Courtesy of J.Brian Beilman

Sheila Beilman Mead
2007



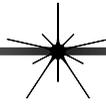
I was my parents' medical health care advocate for ten years and with that experience, I see the need to educate the public on end of life issues. (I am a nurse also).

I am an advocate for nursing home reform but unless you realize what happens at the end of life, few changes will be made. Changes happen when the majority of people make demands.

You need to be responsible for how you want your life to end and make it known to your family and physicians.

These issues must be thought about even if it is unpleasant.





LIVING WILL

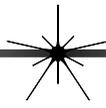
This is a document that states what you want done with the end of your life. Do you want to be resuscitated? This means, if you quit breathing or your heart stops do you want your heart started up again and a tube put in your windpipe? This tube is hooked to a machine that will breathe for you. Do you want fluid given to you? Most people think that if you don't feed or give the patient fluids by vein, that he/she will starve to death. In reality, you are interfering with the process of dying. The body is shutting down the stomach functions, the desire to have something to drink, and all other functions. At times, medical procedures are done to make us, the family feel better. Include on this document, that you want to be kept clean, to have your mouth moistened and to be kept pain free. These are things that Hospice will do, but until they are involved, you want to make sure this happens.

A living will should be done, no matter what age you are.

There are machines to keep you breathing, your heart beating and the kidneys working: think of the quality of life.

If you are caring for someone in the home that has a living will, keep in mind that if you call an ambulance, medical personnel must resuscitate that person. If an ambulance is used for transportation of the family member, a form can be signed not to resuscitate. Keep a copy of the living will on you at all times. All doctors, dentists and other healthcare workers that you have,





must have a copy of your living will. Your family needs a copy. Update this document often.

Unmarried couples, whether of the same sex or opposite sex, should have written legal contracts to cover all these issues that are discussed in this pamphlet

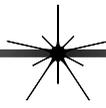
MEDICAL HEALTH CARE ADVOCATE FORM

This is a document, with one or two names on it, saying who will be responsible for the health care of a certain person. Choose someone who will do what you want when you are sick and dying. This person speaks for you if you are unable.

FINANCES

You need to choose someone to be the financial power of attorney and executor of your belongings. This person can be anyone, but it should be someone able to manage money. The bank can do this also. After death, the executor will pay final bills and take care of the will. Decide ahead of time to whom, you want to give your household items, jewelry and pets. It is important to meet with a financial planner ahead of time to decide how to pay for the nursing home. Important papers such as car and home insurance should be located and reviewed. Include in your will, your email address and password, so the computer contents can be opened.





LONG TERM CARE INSURANCE

The cost of assisted living/nursing home care is at least \$5,000 a month. The younger you are when you sign up for a policy the cheaper the premiums.

ORGAN DONATION

Be specific about what you want to donate: specific parts of your body or your whole body.

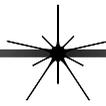
FUNERAL

Buy a burial plot; plan your funeral. It is easier to make a decision about this ahead of time, as it is not such an emotional time. It is not necessary to have the most expensive coffin or even a funeral.

DEPRESSION

It is common for the elderly to feel sad and/or not want to participate in life. Perhaps an antidepressant would be of help. Music and touch are great ways to reach someone's soul and receive a response. Stimulation plays a large role in your interaction with this person. Remember to speak at eye level. Keep conversation topics simple. Discuss the color of a flower, show family photos, look at a magazine, talk about what food they are eating. Bring a favorite treat for them.





FAMILY PARTICIPATION

Consistent family visitation is not common in assisted living facilities and nursing homes. Family members may live elsewhere or not get along. Often there is a problem with lack of sibling participation in the care of their parents or family member. Also, it is more likely that a woman in the family will take on the responsibility. Geriatric care managers can be hired to manage the care of the family member.

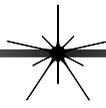
HOSPITALIZATION

You need to think of the possibility of your family member going to the hospital. It is necessary for a family member to be with that person to make sure that the appropriate care is being provided. Be aware that there is a nursing shortage in hospitals. Make sure that the hospital staff, wash their hands before touching the patient; this prevents infection. Can you imagine being in a hospital by yourself, confused and sick? If the patient can be treated in the home or facility, do so. Eliminate unnecessary trips to the emergency room. If the patient has a living will, there may not be a need to go to the hospital.

SELECTION OF A NURSING HOME

Pick a location close to family members. It may mean moving this person from one state to another. Usually, when the family member needs an assisted living facility or nursing home, it means his/her world has changed.





Friends are gone; the patient can no longer drive and is not capable of staying in his/her home safely. It is more important for the family member to be close to the medical advocate. Keep the family member at home as long as possible with outside support. Some families opt to care for a family member in their home. Be aware of the stress, the feeling of being overwhelmed and overworked. Feelings of guilt often arise if the situation does not work out.

Assisted living is a place for those that can dress themselves, feed themselves, walk or manage in a wheelchair and take medication with help. When the time comes that a person is unable to do these things, it is time to go to a nursing home. Do your homework ahead of the time before this person needs these facilities. This gives you time to look at many places. Take a tour; ask questions. You may be able to have the family member go also.

Is the place clean?

Does it smell?

Look at the dining room and public bathrooms.

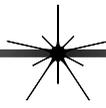
Look at the residents' bathrooms and shower area.

What are the residents doing?

Ask about staffing. (At this time, there is no specific education required of staff for caring for residents with confusion). There is usually one registered nurse who is working eight hours out of 24 hours.

Medication aides give the pills. The training is minimal.





When the resident asks for help, how rapid is the response?

Does the staff of the facility, speak to you?

Listen to how the staff speaks to the residents.

Are the men shaved?

Check for clean, cut nails.

Visit at mealtime; are residents getting fed? It should take about one hour to feed and give the resident something to drink.

Do the residents go outside daily?

Are there activities for your family member to do? If the family member can't play bingo, what will take its place? There may come a time, that listening to music, a hand or back rub, or going outside is all that the resident can do.

The staff turnover in these places is very high.

Read the state inspection survey reports.

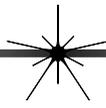
MANAGEMENT OF CARE

The family and medical advocate must visit their family member very often to make sure that the resident is getting the care he/she deserves and is paying for.

Visit at different times, even at night.

Be aware that it is necessary for the resident to drink juice, water, coffee, etc., often. This helps prevent





constipation, a urinary infection and dry lips.

The teeth must be brushed at least twice a day. A person can get very sick from a dirty mouth. The gums will bleed if the brushing is not done correctly.

Check for facial hairs that need to be removed.

You must look at the skin of your family member's body at least weekly. Start at the head and look all the way to the toes. Turn the patient over.

Is the skin red at the elbows, heels, and under-pants area, under the breasts or at the tailbone?

Know what medications the resident is on and why. Remember, less is sometimes better.

Decide if the resident needs to continue seeing the dentist.

A podiatrist (foot doctor) must cut toenails of residents in these facilities. Make sure that it is done.

Some facilities have a doctor come to the facility; this is so much easier on the resident and family. Try to get a doctor that specializes in caring for older people. (Geriatric physician)

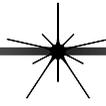
If the doctor orders blood tests or other testing, ask why. Less is better.

Are the bed, table and wheelchair clean?

If the family member is unable to move on his/her own, is the staff rotating their positions every two hours?

Also, the resident must be changed every two hours if he/





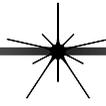
she is unable to use bathroom. Make sure that the staff clean the resident the same way all the time. There is a written procedure for this.

Go to the director of the facility and also call the ombudsman with complaints of negligent care. You have that right. An ombudsman is someone who helps with the problems that you may have with the care of the resident. The phone number to call this person is on the wall close to the entrance of the facility. An ombudsman does not work for the facility but is hired by the state.

HOSPICE

This wonderful organization will guide the family through the death process, keep the dying person pain free, and give dignity to the dying person. It does not matter what disease the patient has; hospice will help. Insurance/Medicare/Medicaid pays for Hospice care.





*Taking care of these issues before the end of life
makes it easier for all involved.*

*Time can then be given to this person to say
“I love you”, “I forgive you”,
“You were a great dad/mom”,
“It is okay to let go”.*



