

Living With Hope ... Confronting Our Fears

A series on death and dying: The Catholic Perspective

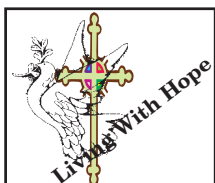
Advance Directives: The Need For Communication

Most states, including Ohio, have enacted legislation legally recognizing certain “advance directives.” Such directives allows a person’s medical treatment preferences to be known in the event they are unable to speak for themselves.

Deciding to forego treatment and allowing a loved one to die is never easy. Choosing an advance directive should be done prayerfully and carefully. Advance directives do not provide easy answers for difficult end-of-life decisions. In fact such instruments are only as good as the quality of conversation and communication-- with family, loved ones, physicians, etc.-- that precede and lead to their completion.

Living Will (LW)

A document completed in advance that allows one to indicate the medical care one wishes to receive or not receive should one become both terminally ill **and** unable to speak for themselves.



Two ongoing concerns in using a LW include the ability in many cases to properly define the term “terminally ill,” and being able to readily determine the particular medical treatments one may or may not want prior to the actual occurrence.

A LW will override a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care. Since a LW states decisions based upon limited information it may not be the best advance directive, especially if someone you love is not immediately facing an illness which is severe and which usually causes death. However, a LW is sometimes appropriate and its use can be within the keeping of Catholic medical/moral teaching.

Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care (DPA)

A document designating someone, very often a family member, to make health care decisions in the event that a medical condition prevents the patient from doing so.

A Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care is preferred over a Living Will.

It allows the holder of the DPA to confer with the health care team in a concrete situation, and *interpret* the patient’s preferences and *apply* them in light of the specific diagnosis and prognosis provided by the physicians.

Do Not Resuscitate Orders (DNR)

A DNR order may be issued to terminally ill or permanently unconscious patients by a physician or certified nurse practitioner/specialist. It should be issued after consultation with the patient. Ohio offers the DNR Comfort Care protocol which specifies that only comfort care and not resuscitation will occur in certain situations. This protocol allows persons to obtain a necklace, bracelet, card, or form designating such wishes.

In situations where a person does not have a Living Will, DPA or a DNR Order, the decision passes to family members in the following order: spouse, children as a group, parents, siblings.

**For More Information
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