

GETTING YOUR AFFAIRS IN ORDER

Topic #14: **Preparing A Living Will**

We've all heard the horror stories in the news about family members battling each other over what should or shouldn't be done to prolong the life of a loved one who is in a permanent vegetative state and unable to communicate his or her wishes.

These situations occur when individuals do not have a Living Will or *Advance Medical Directive* and have not clearly stated their wishes regarding their health care in the event they are unable to take care of themselves or communicate. You can take control of what happens to you if have a Living Will.

As difficult as it may be to ponder these decisions, it can make all the difference in your role as a caregiver if you know your loved one's wishes. Take a few moments to learn about these terms. And then take action to make sure you have the proper legal paperwork for your loved one.

What Is A Living Will?:

A Living Will is a written document that states your intentions regarding treatments you want or don't want if you are unable to speak for yourself and are terminally ill or permanently unconscious. On its own, a Living Will is very limited because it does not cover all situations and usually applies only to life prolonging decisions.

Each of us must decide what circumstances, if any, we would not wish to endure. By considering three primary factors---type, severity, and permanence or irreversibility of the medical situation, we may be better able to decide.

Avoid Vague Terms:

If you wish treatment or certain types of treatments to be withheld, you should be as specific as possible about what you mean.

For example, withholding “extraordinary care” or “life-sustaining” treatments are vague statements and subject to interpretation. Complex and expensive high tech treatments are very common and aren’t considered “extraordinary.” And at the same time, many life-sustaining treatments, even after withdrawal, may not always result in immediate death.

Two Reasons To Refuse Treatment:

There are two very broad reasons you may want to take into consideration for refusing treatment. The first is that the benefit of the treatment isn’t great enough to justify its risk or discomfort. What level of risk or discomfort you are willing to endure is an individual choice.

The second reason to refuse medical treatment is that it will prolong life under intolerable conditions. However, even simple treatments such as a feeding tube may be considered intolerable to an individual if it prolongs life in the face of an unwanted circumstance.

How do you determine or help a loved one decide which circumstances are not acceptable to prolong life? The circumstances and decisions are as individual as you are. By going to the *Advance Medical Directives* learning tool you can view a list of questions that will help in your decision making.

If you have any questions about your health, or the continued health of your loved ones, contact us. Meridian At Home Advisors specialize in listening to your health care concerns and identifying the services and technologies that will allow you or a person close to you to continue to lead a healthy, independent life at home. Our advisors will gladly arrange for a registered nurse to conduct a free, in-home consultative assessment. Call us toll-free at 1-800-894-6885. You can also click on [Connect with Meridian At Home](#) to have one of our advisors contact you at a convenient time. Meridian At Home, Where you want to be.