Advance Health Directive: The Living Will and The Power of Attorney

A living will, also called will to live, is one type of advanced health care system, or advanced health care principle. It often goes along with a specific type of power of attorney. These are legal tools that are usually witnessed or notarized.A living will usually covers specific directions as to the course of treatment that is to be taken by caregivers, or, in particular, in some cases denying treatment and sometimes also food and water, should the patient be unable to give conscious consent ("individual health care instruction") due to illness.A power of attorney for health care, appoints an individual (a proxy) to give health care decisions should the patient be unable to do so.Refusal of treatment forms, the name suggests, the term "will to live", as opposed to the other terms, tends to point out the wish to live as long as possible rather than refusing treatment in the case of serious conditions.In the Netherlands, patients and likely patients can identify the circumstances under which they would want euthanasia for themselves. They do this by providing a written order. This helps to ascertain the preexisting expressed wish of the patient even if the patient is no longer able to exchange a few words. However, it is only one of the factors that is taken into account.In Switzerland, there are several associations which take care of registering patient declarations, forms which are signed by the patients declaring that in case of unending loss of judgment (e.g., inability to communicate or severe brain damage) all means of prolonged life shall be stopped. Family members and groups, also keep alternatives which entitle its holder to enforce such patient decrees. Establishing such decrees is pretty straightforward.In the United States, most states recognize living wills or the label of a health care surrogate. However, a "report card" issued by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in 2002 concluded that only seven states deserved an "A" for meeting the standards of the model Uniform Rights of the Terminally Ill Act. Surveys show that one-third of Americans say they've had to make decisions about end-of-life care for a loved one.

About the Author

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