

# Senior Minutes

By Senior PsychCare and Senior Psychological Care, LLC

**A Better Quality of Life Through Integrated Mental Healthcare**

## Advance Care Planning and the Elderly Patient



(Summarized by Dr. Borrell. Source: Fried TR, Redding CA, Robbins ML, O'Leary JR & Iannone L. Agreement Between Older Persons and Their Surrogate Decision-Makers Regarding Participation in Advance Care Planning. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*. 2011;59:1105-1109.)

In order to receive the desired outcome that is best for a patient and his/her family, Advance Care Planning (ACP) has become an important proactive step in patient care. However, advanced directives must be signed and in place before decisions are to be made. Within the medical community, four distinct directives are considered to represent the discrete behavioral components of ACP. They are the living will, healthcare proxy, communication regarding views about life-sustaining treatment, and communication regarding views about quality versus quantity of life. Ideally, these documents are discussed with the surrogate decision-maker when they are not needed and emotions are less of a factor. Additionally the documents should be revisited frequently and changed if needed.

This study looks into the effectiveness and strength of communication of the patient's desires with the surrogate decision-maker because earlier studies note that there is frequent disagreement regarding treatment preferences and whether an advance directive document has been completed. The majority of the surrogates in this study were children or spouses and reported speaking with the older person on a regular basis. The surrogates and the patients in the study were interviewed. The pa-

tients were asked if they had participated

in each of the four ACP behavioral components. The surrogates were asked if they believed the older person had completed each of these activities.

The study found that when a disagreement did occur, it most often erred on the side of the surrogate stating that a directive had been completed and the patient stating that it had not. Agreement for whether a person had completed a living will was reported as good. However, there was a substantial proportion of pairs who disagreed about whether even this document had been completed. The study also reports that the lack of executed directives has an effect on patient care and health. Additionally, surrogates report more stress when they feel they are not fully aware of their loved-one's preferences. Furthermore, this study found that in spite of reporting not feeling fully informed of a loved one's preferences, surrogates were more likely to report that communication had occurred.

The study concludes that it is possible, even with disagreement regarding the ACP process, for the surrogate to understand and communicate the patient's wishes. However, the lack of agreement between the surrogate and the pa-

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**Advance Care Planning and the Elderly Patient (Cont.)**

tient is problematic partly because strengthened relationships are seen by the patient as an important part of quality care. Ensuring that patients and their designated surrogates are heard throughout the complex ACP process helps the surrogate communicate their loved one’s wishes not only to friends and family of the patient but to the medical community as well. This enables a greater understanding of the patient’s preferences by all. ■

**Resources for Advance Care Planning**

Texas requires a specific statutory state form to accompany your advance care planning documents. Advance care planning forms for Texas residents can be accessed through the Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS) at [http://www.dads.state.tx.us/news\\_info/publications/handbooks/index.html](http://www.dads.state.tx.us/news_info/publications/handbooks/index.html) or at [http://cdn.aarp.net/content/dam/aarp/relationships/caregiving/2011\\_01/ad/Texas.pdf](http://cdn.aarp.net/content/dam/aarp/relationships/caregiving/2011_01/ad/Texas.pdf)

The DADS website also has a very useful page on frequently asked questions regarding Advance Care Planning. There are many other useful pages within this website on planning. Please review thoroughly and if needed, discuss your plans with a trusted authority in order to be fully informed before executing documents.

Additional material that you may find useful in clearly expressing your personal wishes and can be attached to the above-referenced DADS

documents are: “Five Wishes” and “Next Steps.”



Both can be accessed for a fee online at [www.agingwithdignity.org/about.php](http://www.agingwithdignity.org/about.php). These publications are considered to be additional resources, optional, and are not necessary for the completion of your directives.

*If you would like to receive **Senior Minutes** via email, please go to [www.seniorpsychiatry.com](http://www.seniorpsychiatry.com) and click on the button **“subscribe”** and you will be entered into a drawing for a free camcorder.*

