



In This Issue...

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED what you want for your end-of-life care? If you've given it some thought, have you filled out your advance directives to let your loved ones and healthcare professionals know your wishes?

In an age where life can be sustained by technology, these questions take on a significance that was not an issue prior to the invention of the first modern respirator, the iron lung, in 1927.

In today's world, some want all treatment possible, while others would prefer to minimize interventions or receive only comfort care. So, the question remains, what would the patient want? If documents defining the individual's wishes have not been signed or are not readily available to physicians, the family is often left to struggle with that question in a crisis.

Nevada is now one of only a handful of states with a secure online registry to file advance directives and make them accessible to healthcare providers. We encourage everyone to take the opportunity to make his or her wishes known and available through Nevada's state-of-the-art registry, www.livingwilllockbox.com.

SALLY HARDWICK, M.S., INTERIM DIRECTOR
NEVADA CENTER FOR ETHICS & HEALTH POLICY



New ADVANCE DIRECTIVES REGISTRY

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE STATE'S HISTORY, Nevadans can file their advance directives to specify their end-of-life or emergency care wishes with the Secretary of State's new web-based electronic document repository,

www.livingwilllockbox.com. Advance directives that may be filed include living wills, which limit healthcare treatment, do not resuscitate orders, and durable powers of attorney for healthcare, which designate someone to make healthcare decisions in case of a person's incapacitation.

The new service, Living Will Lockbox, is a free, password-protected registry that will make these legal documents immediately available to authorized healthcare providers. A simple and secure way to ensure individuals' medical wishes are followed, the registry will be particularly helpful for emergency room physicians who often face the challenge of caring for people without knowing their wishes for life-sustaining treatment.

Nevada is one of the few states nationwide to have a registry of this type. Approved by the 2007 Nevada Legislature, AB 158 was sponsored by Assemblyman David Bobzien (D-Washoe, District 224) with the support of a number of organizations, including the Nevada Center for Ethics & Health Policy. "In my district," said Bobzien, "I have many neighbors who are older or who are taking care of their parents or other family members, and I saw this as a good tool to help them."

According to Sally Hardwick, M.S., NCEHP interim director and a lecturer for the University of Nevada, Reno School of Public Health, advance directives are important not only for elders but anyone over 18. "This is an issue that affects everyone," said Hardwick. "All the major cases involving life support that have been publicly debated, such as the Terri Schiavo case, have involved younger people." Terri Schiavo was a 27-year-old Florida woman who had extensive brain damage that left her in a vegetative state for 15 years until it was legally ruled her feeding tube could be removed.



Division of Health Sciences
University of Nevada, Reno

The Nevada Center for Ethics & Health Policy (NCEHP) is a statewide program in the new Division of Health Sciences at the University of Nevada, Reno. Its mission is to promote ethical and appropriate healthcare through education, research and service.

NEW ADVANCE DIRECTIVES REGISTRY CONTINUED

Filing an advance directive is easy and requires only two steps:

- Download advance directives forms from a website such as the one created by NCEHP, www.NVLivingWill.com. This online program addresses many questions about advance directives, assures the forms are completed correctly and produces a document ready for notarization or the required signatures. Paper copies are available by calling NCEHP at 775-327-2309. It is best to complete the forms with the assistance of family members, an attorney, healthcare professionals or other trusted advisors.
- Obtain a registration agreement from the Secretary of State's office or online at www.livingwilllockbox.com. Then mail or fax the advance directives documents and the signed registration agreement to:

Living Will Lockbox
c/o Nevada Secretary of State
101 N. Carson Street, Suite 3
Carson City, NV 89701-3714
Fax: 775-684-7177

The registrant will receive a filing confirmation letter and a registration ID card. Those who do not choose to file the actual documents may simply provide the location of their advance directives.

To access the registry, healthcare providers must become authorized through the Secretary of State's office. All forms are confidential and available to registrants and healthcare providers 24 hours a day. Registrants may change their forms as desired.

For more information, visit the NCEHP website at www.NVLivingWill.com or the Secretary of State's registry website at www.livingwilllockbox.com. You may also call NCEHP at 775-327-2309 in Reno or 702-257-5537 in Las Vegas.



The Need for a Registry

RECENT STUDIES SHOW that 22 percent of Nevadans have completed advance directives, but healthcare professionals rarely see the documents in emergency settings.

"Federal law requires that patients be asked if they have advance directives, yet there was no way for physicians to easily access them. It was a real disconnect," said NCEHP Interim Director Sally Hardwick.

Curtis Brown, M.D., of Northern Nevada Emergency Physicians, believes the concept of having real-time access to advance directives is an excellent idea. "We all hope this addresses a problem that has loomed over the medical community for years. I think it is a wonderful sign that the state of Nevada has taken the lead to protect our patients and their wishes in their final hours."

In the absence of an advance directive, the emergency room physician must provide all possible treatment. "Sometimes we go to incredible lengths to save someone's life only to find out within a few hours or days they wanted nothing done," said Wayne Hardwick, M.D., an emergency room physician for 30 years.

"Families don't always agree on treatment when there is no advance directive," said Dr. Hardwick. He cited a situation where a patient had been intubated by paramedics, but when a family member arrived, she had the tube removed saying the patient didn't want it. Another family member showed up and indicated the patient wanted everything done so the tube was put back in. Once it was learned the patient's physician had a copy of his advance directives, it turned out the man did not want any of this done. "The saddest part," said Dr. Hardwick, "is that in the eight hours it took us to get the information, the patient and family went through a very difficult experience."

R. ElizaBeth Beyer, R.N., M.S., J.D., (nurse-lawyer-rabbi), has served as the liaison between NCEHP and the Secretary of State's office. "This is relevant to all Nevadans," said Beyer. "From a nursing perspective, advance directives are essential so healthcare professionals know how people want to be treated. From a pastoral perspective, people should talk about this as a family and make decisions in the best interest of everyone. From a legal perspective, it is important to make your wishes known, and if you're not capable of speaking those wishes, there is a document that will do it for you through your designated healthcare agent."

