

The Living Will

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Have you discussed your wishes for end-of-life issues with your family and your doctor? It is a difficult subject to broach, but one that is very important to ensure that your wishes are respected, and to ease the burden on those around you.

While you are still generally healthy is the time to think about providing directives to those who will be responsible for your care if you become unable to do so yourself. A Living Will is the ideal way for you to express your desires.

The Clinical Ethics Sub-committee of the Sir Mortimer B. Davis - Jewish General Hospital has spent considerable time and energy considering this subject. Its members have created a set of documents that can guide you through the process of clarifying your own thoughts and communicating them to your doctor and to your family.

One of these documents is a simple brochure that describes the purpose and process of creating an Advance Directive Living Will. It is available at <http://tinyurl.com/384262p> and answers the basic Why and How of preparing the document, encouraging you to discuss the details of your end-of-life care with a doctor you know and trust. Ask your doctor lots of questions to ensure you understand what kinds of procedures are available for treatment or for palliative care and pain management. With that information you can make informed decisions based on your own moral and ethical values and can share them with those who you name to speak for you if you can no longer speak for yourself.

With the knowledge gained through the process of discussing and thinking through the options, the next step is actually filling out the Advance Directive form (<http://tinyurl.com/2bq4olq>), signing it, and ensuring that it is in the hands of the Mandatary that you name to act in your place, your surrogate decision-maker under Quebec law, if you are no longer able to express your desires yourself. Keep in mind that this document covers only health care issues and is not related to legal documents prepared by notaries or lawyers dealing with such things as property or financial management.

If you follow the link and look at the Advance Directive, you will see that it includes an extensive 3-page glossary of terms. You will see complete definitions for the purposes of expressing your wishes for such things as *dementia*, *stroke*, *persistent vegetative state*, *life-saving surgery* and many more terms, conditions and treatments. Five pages of multiple-choice questions follow, along with plenty of space for you to express your desires in your own terms. These questions ask you to consider each of many possible responses to a series of circumstances in which you may find yourself. They ask you if, in each case, you would want treatment to be initiated, performed or sustained, withdrawn, or withheld.

The next page is where you identify your Mandatary or Mandataries, chosen by you because of their ability to speak strongly on your behalf if you are unable to do so yourself. Think this out carefully and consider discussing the possible choices with someone you respect. The Mandatary must sign the form along with you, indicating his or her understanding and consent to act.

A checklist of all the recommended steps to take to prepare a Living Will and to ensure that those who need to know are properly informed of its existence follows. The last pages include place for witnesses to sign with you and a section for you to express your wishes regarding organ donation.

It is important to update your Advance Directive Living Will every few years, as circumstances change for you or your Mandatary. This is a difficult subject to think about, but you will rest easier if you know that your wishes will be respected even if you are no longer able to express them.

Sheila Eskenazi, President, English Communities Committee of the CSSS des Sommets
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