

Introduction to Advance Healthcare Directives: Biological and Ethical

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Abstract.

The increasing sophistication of medical skills and expertise, in combination with the availability of diagnostic and therapeutic equipment has revolutionized the way health care is delivered, making possible the treatment of previously considered untreatable conditions and diseases. On the other hand, several studies have documented critical deficits in the medical care of the dying, reporting that in many cases this has been unnecessarily prolonged, being painful, expensive, and emotionally onerous for both patients and their relatives. Dynamic and occasionally belligerent medical intervention may result in many patients left confined to nursing homes, or medically frail as to survive only through the use of feeding tubes. Furthermore, a significant number of patients are kept alive in comatose and permanently vegetative states. Moreover cost burdens to individuals and families are substantial even if they had insurance in a certain percentage. Advance healthcare directives, also referred as living will, personal directives, advance directives, medical directives or advance decision, is a legal document in which a person specifies what actions should be taken for his/her health if he/she were no longer able to make decisions for themselves because of illness or incapacity. In the U.S. it has a legal status in itself, whereas in some countries it is legally persuasive without being a legal document.

Key words: advance healthcare directives, Biological and Ethical, illness or incapacity.