

If you are receiving this message, you are a person with whom I have at sometime worked to make improvements in the way our culture addresses care at the end of life.

Some of you will have already heard about the declaration of April 16, 2008, as the Inaugural National Healthcare Decisions Day. If you are one of those persons, you need read no further. Please just consider this a nudge gently urging you to complete a participation form (www.nationalhealthcaredecisionsday.org/maintopics/sign_up) and join us in this important effort.

If you haven't heard of the effort to launch a National Healthcare Decisions Day on April 16, 2008, please read on.

Imagine this: There is one specific day each year when no one in the United States is able to open a newspaper, watch TV, listen to the radio, see a physician, go to a library, a religious service or a healthcare facility without hearing or seeing some message about the importance of advance care planning. Picture a time, perhaps only a few years from now, when as a result of this annual observance all Americans are more informed about and more comfortable with the notion of advance care planning than they have ever been. Picture a time when nearly every family in America has talked about their concerns and preferences regarding care at the end of life, when doctors faced with treating terminal patients who have lost the capacity to make decisions can be confident that the persons named as the healthcare proxies for their patients have had thoughtful discussions with the persons they are making decisions for, and when caregivers can have the greatest possible peace of mind, knowing that they have done the best they could to honor the wishes of their loved ones.

This is the vision of the National Healthcare Decisions Day Initiative. An impressive group of nearly 50 national organizations and ever increasing numbers of regional, state and community organizations are committed to demystifying the public's perceptions about advance care planning and promoting the conditions in which all adults in the United States have both the opportunity and the inclination to thoughtfully discuss their wishes about end-of-life care with their loved ones, their prospective healthcare agent and their doctors. For a list of the national organizations endorsing the National Healthcare Decisions Day see <http://www.nationalhealthcaredecisionsday.org/maintopics/involved>. I am hoping that you will want to be a part of this effort.

Please visit the NHDD website www.healthcaredecisionsday.org, click on "participation form" under the "Join Us" button and fill out the required information.

I know that many of you are connected with organizations that have excellent programs already in place to promote advance care planning. If that is the case, participation in the NHDD initiative does not require you to change in any way what you are already doing. You can use the occasion of a National Day to give your current efforts more exposure. I also know that many of you are so involved in other important efforts that you may feel you have no time for an additional project. If that is the case, please know that the

commitment to participate could be limited to putting the date on your organization's calendar, putting an article in your newsletter or putting up a poster a few weeks before the day.

I believe that this initiative is an opportunity to make significant progress toward a change in the prevailing American cultural attitude toward advance care planning -- to change our culture from one that shapes its members to avoid advance care planning and deny the need to think about end of life decisions to one that shapes its members to be comfortable with advance care planning and to be entirely ready to face realistically the decisions about their end-of-life care that may have to be made by others. I hope you will agree and that you will want to be part of that effort. Please visit our website and do whatever you can to spread the word about the Inaugural National Healthcare Decisions Day on April 16, 2008.

Sincerely,

Jack Stanley
Lawrence University Program in Bioethics
Past Chairman, American Health Decisions
Past President Wisconsin Health Decisions