

April 16, 2008, Designated *National Healthcare Decisions Day*

The American Hospital Association, the Federation of American Hospitals and the American Medical Association have joined a broad array of over 50 national organizations to establish a National Healthcare Decisions Day on April 16, 2008. The National Healthcare Decisions Day Initiative is a collaborative effort of national, state and community organizations committed to ensuring that all adults with decision-making capacity in the United States have the information necessary to thoughtfully discuss and execute a reliable advance directive document prior to any future hospitalization. For more information, visit www.nationalhealthcaredecisionsday.org.

It is widely known that the Federal Patient Self-Determination Act requires that all Medicare participating healthcare facilities provide information to patients about advance directives. It is less known that the Act also requires hospitals to provide community education about options for advance care planning.

Unfortunately, despite these laws, designed to give patients a choice about important end-of-life decisions, fewer than 25% of our population have executed an advance directive and even fewer have entered into thoughtful discussions with their family and their prospective healthcare agent prior to executing a written document. Moreover, fewer than 50% of severely or terminally ill patients have an advance directive in their medical records. And too few hospitals are doing all they should to educate their patients, their staff and their community about the options people have in advance care planning.

The National Healthcare Decisions Day Initiative is asking that every hospital in the US, on April 16, 2008, designate some area in their facility to be open to the public for distribution of free forms and information about advance care planning. On that day each hospital could have staff or trained volunteers available to answer questions and provide information about how to engage in thoughtful advance care planning. Members of ethics committees, chaplains, case managers, social workers, and intake staff could help in this process.

ThedaCare Health System has joined with Affinity Health System, the Fox Cities Family Practice Residency, the Fox Cities Coalition for End-of-life Care, and the Lawrence University Program in Bioethics to organize the Wisconsin participation in the NHDD initiative. They are urging every hospital and nursing home in Wisconsin to sign up as a participating organization by sending an email to nhdd@nhpco.org or by visiting the NHDD website (www.nationalhealthcaredecisionsday.org/maintopics/sign_up), clicking on “**participation form**” and confirming participation in this important initiative.

And it is a “win/win” opportunity! Participation in the National Healthcare Decisions Day not only involves hospitals in an important public service, reaching out to their communities to improve the public awareness and understanding of advance care planning, it also demonstrates full compliance, not only with the Federal Patient Self-Determination Act, but also with the CMS Conditions of Participation and JCAHO accreditation standards.