

The Importance of Pre-Planning: Alzheimer's Disease and Health Care Proxies

- Alzheimer's disease is one of the most emotionally draining and traumatic diseases for patients and families alike. The progressive, degenerative nature of Alzheimer's disease presents unique challenges for health care proxies.
- During the end stages of Alzheimer's disease the patient typically loses the ability to communicate effectively with their loved ones; adding an additional burden to the health care proxy.
- It is essential for families to openly discuss the kind of end-of-life care early, while the person with Alzheimer's still has the ability to communicate their wishes.
- Families can often benefit from a mediator (an independent third party, usually a social worker) to facilitate the discussion of end-of-life care.
- Working through a variety of scenarios can help the family to form a consensus about the use of artificial nutrition, hydration and breathing machines like ventilators.
- Pre-planning allows the family to clarify choices and make decisions in advance of a crisis situation.
- Pre-planning allows families to resolve disagreements while not under the extreme stress and pressure of making a time sensitive decision.
- Pre-planning also opens up lines of communication between family members and doctors.
- For the person with Alzheimer's disease, advance planning gives him/her a voice in determining the type of end-of-life care he/she wants.
- Pre-planning empowers the person with Alzheimer's to choose someone to speak for them.
- Pre-planning provides an opportunity for the person with Alzheimer's to comfortably discuss their wishes.
- Pre-planning enables the family to investigate community resources like hospice care in advance. This allows patients and families to decide together on the care one will receive.



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