

MEDICAL & END-OF-THIS-LIFE DECISIONS

One of the easiest, most effective, and most broadly-recognized resources to help you make medical and end-of-this-life decisions is a booklet called, *Five Wishes*[®]. There are over four million in print. The booklet costs \$5 (or \$1 each for 100 copies or more). Place orders at www.agingwithdignity.org or by calling 1-888-594-7437.

The *Five Wishes* document is one of many possible Medical Power of Attorney forms, important forms that help you express how you want to be treated if you are seriously ill and unable to speak for yourself. It is important to sign a Medical Power of Attorney that is valid in the state where you live, and that it is properly witnessed and notarized. The *Five Wishes* form is unique among living will and health agent forms because it looks to all of a person's needs: medical, personal, emotional and spiritual. It also encourages you to discuss your wishes with your family and physician.



The Five Wishes booklet lets your family and doctors know:

1. Who you want to make health care decisions for you when you can't make them yourself.
2. The kind of medical treatment you want or don't want.
3. How comfortable you want to be.
4. How you want people to treat you.
5. What you want your loved ones to know.

What is the Five Wishes booklet? The following information is from the Five Wishes website (www.agingwithdignity.org). *Five Wishes* is an easy-to-use legal document that lets you plan in advance for how you want to be cared for in case you become seriously ill. Some people refer to it as an “advance directive” because when you complete *Five Wishes* you give direction to your doctor and family, in advance, on how you want to be treated.

- **Wish One** lets you choose the person you want to make decisions for you when you can't make them for yourself. Lawyers call it a “durable power of attorney for health care.”
- **Wish Two** is a living will. It lets you put in writing the kind of medical treatment you want, or don't want, if you become seriously ill and can't communicate to anyone.
- **Wishes Three and Four** let you describe in detail how you want to be treated so that your dignity can be maintained.
- **Wish Five** gives you a chance to tell others how you want to be remembered, and express other things that might be in your heart, like forgiveness.

Why should I fill out Five Wishes? Without an advance directive like *Five Wishes*, you may have no control over important medical care decisions that will be made if you ever get seriously ill – such as whether to give you life-support treatment or aggressively treat your pain. Everyone has different wishes and yours won't be followed unless you make them clear. Not expressing your wishes can put your family, friends and doctor in the difficult position of guessing what kind of treatment you want, which could lead to disagreements. Completing *Five Wishes* gives you control over your care and peace of mind for you and your loved ones.

When do I need to use Five Wishes? The best time to fill out a document like this is *before* you face a health crisis. You never know when you are going to need *Five Wishes*, and many people put it off until it's too late. If you are over age 18, you should complete the forms now. If you are married, you and your spouse each need to fill out your own *Five Wishes* document.

When does Five Wishes take effect? You will always make your own health care decisions, if you are able to talk with your doctor and understand what is being said. *Five Wishes* only takes effect when you are too ill to communicate. So if you have a stroke and can't speak, or are in a coma, then your *Five Wishes* and the person you chose to be your health care agent, can help direct your care with your doctor.

Is Five Wishes a legal document? Yes. It was written with the help of the American Bar Association's Commission on the Legal Problems of the Elderly. It meets legal requirements under the advance directive statutes in most states.

For additional answers, or to order booklets for you or your loved ones, go to: www.agingwithdignity.org