

Advance Directives: Society President Encouraging Completion of Health Care POAs

One of my goals as president of the Wisconsin Medical Society (Society) is to increase awareness about the importance of advance care planning.

According to statistics from the State Bar of Wisconsin, an estimated 80% of Wisconsin residents—including 50% of those with severe or terminal illnesses—have not completed an advance directive to document their preferences about issues surrounding end-of-life decisions.¹ I believe that—through physician leadership—we can do better.

The Society and I are polling physicians and medical students as to whether or not they have completed their own health care power of attorney. The good news is that with over 1900 responses so far, 61% of the 1165 physicians who responded have completed a health care POA; and an additional 26% indicate they plan to do so in the next 12 months. That's in contrast to 150 of 442 medical students who responded that they have filled one out.

I discussed this initiative at the recent AMA Annual Meeting, and I am urging other states to join this effort. I am asking physicians and other health care professionals who have not completed the survey to do so. It is available online at <http://WMS.informz.net/survistapro/s.asp?id=6530>. Additionally, the Society can also assist other state medical societies and specialty societies who wish to survey their members. E-mail communications@wismed.org for more information. Hopefully, the data we gather can be used to encourage all of us to express our health care wishes.

Hopefully, the data we gather can be used in our outreach efforts to encourage colleagues and patients to complete an advance directive. I believe it's essential that everyone have a conversation with their loved ones about their health care wishes, so that in the event they are unable to speak for themselves their wishes will be clear.

*George M. Lange, MD, FACP
President, Wisconsin Medical Society*

Reference

1. State Bar celebrates National Healthcare Decisions Day by offering free electronic consumer guides [press release]. Madison, Wis: State Bar of Wisconsin; April 13, 2011. Available at http://www.wisbar.org/am/template.cfm?section=legislative_advocacy&template=/cm/contentdisplay.cfm&contentid=101692. Accessed Aug 4, 2011.

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WMJ

WMJ (ISSN 1098-1861) is published through a collaboration between The Medical College of Wisconsin and The University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. The mission of *WMJ* is to provide an opportunity to publish original research, case reports, review articles, and essays about current medical and public health issues.

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