

Conversations About Care Wishes Can Ease Acute, Stressful Situations

Lisa Hildebrand

As a hospital-based physician, Tosha Wetterneck, MD, MS, FACP, has witnessed the profound impact advance care planning can have on patients, their families, and their caregivers. She also has experienced myriad difficulties when patients have not documented their care wishes before they arrived at the hospital unable to do so.

“It is so much more helpful for everyone involved—patients, family members, physicians and other health care professionals—if these conversations happen when people are healthy,” Dr Wetterneck said during the kick-off event for Honoring Choices Wisconsin, an advance care planning initiative of the Wisconsin Medical Society (Society). “When patients have these discussions before they are acutely ill, it can ease what otherwise might have been a stressful situation for patients and families, and it allows physicians to focus on the patient’s wishes.”

The Society has a long history of support for advance care planning, hospice, and palliative care. Last year, however, its Council on Health Care Ethics recognized, that advance care planning still was not the norm for physicians, patients, and their families and looked for ways to meet the enormous need for improvement.

Conversations among physicians, health care leaders, and community members throughout Wisconsin confirmed Council members’ beliefs, and in April 2012, the Society’s House of Delegates formalized its support for the Society to take a lead role in the development and implementation of a statewide advance care planning initiative. In September,

What is advance care planning?

A process of planning for future medical conditions. This process, to be effective, needs to meet similar standards as the process of informed consent, ie, the person planning needs to:

- Understand selected possible future situations and choices.
- Reason and reflect about what is best.
- Discuss these choices and plans with those who might need to carry out the plan.

What is an advance directive?

A plan, made by a capable person or their surrogate, for future medical care regarding treatments or goals of care for a possible or probable event.

Honoring Choices Wisconsin was launched.

“We saw that some of the best work around this issue was being done right in our backyard,” said George M. Lange, MD, FACP, the Society’s immediate past president. “Respecting Choices® and the greater La Crosse community serve as a model for advance care planning, and we are honored to partner with them to bring their remarkable work to other parts of our state.”

Change, Advocacy, Education

The Society is serving as a convener, coordinator, and catalyst to build system change, advocacy, and education around advance care planning. Using proven concepts, methodologies and materials, Respecting Choices® staff members will provide training at the 8 health systems participating in the first round of pilots of Honoring Choices Wisconsin. Pilot projects are

expected to launch in March 2013. Health systems participating in the first pilot projects are:

- Community Care, Inc., Milwaukee
- Dean Health System and St. Mary’s Hospital, Madison
- Fort HealthCare, Fort Atkinson
- Group Health Cooperative of South Central Wisconsin, Madison
- Meriter Health Services, Madison
- ProHealth Care, Waukesha
- UW Health, Madison
- William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital, Madison

“Although physicians are leading the initiative, community members—including representatives from multicultural, senior and religious organizations—are essential to the success of Honoring Choices Wisconsin,” said Dr Wetterneck, Society president. “They have been involved throughout the planning process, and their participation will continue to grow as community outreach begins.”

The Twin Cities Medical Society (TCMS) in Minnesota utilizes the training, principles and methodology of Respecting Choices® for its advance care planning project, and the Wisconsin Medical Society will model its community engagement efforts on the successful work in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area. Through Honoring Choices Minnesota, families and communities are encouraged to have discussions regarding end-of-life care choices. Support from Twin Cities Public Television has allowed TCMS to broaden its reach into the community.

Partnerships and visibility are integral to the success of an advance care planning proj-



Linda Briggs MS, MA, RN, conducts the First Steps Pre-Training Workshop for the Madison participants of Honoring Choices Wisconsin Oct 3. Briggs is Associate Director Respecting Choices® & Ethics Consultant, Gundersen Lutheran Medical Foundation, Inc.

Honoring Choices Wisconsin Steering Committee members serve as advisers to the Wisconsin Medical Society on how best to pursue Honoring Choices Wisconsin's (HCW's) mission, advocate in public for HCW and its activities, and represent all HCW stakeholders to the project's leadership. Steering Committee and HCW faculty members are, from left, Richard Dart, MD; Pam McGranahan, MSN, RN; Kathleen Ziemba, MSW, LCSW; John Maycroft, MPP; Gina Dennick-Champion, MSN, RN, MSHA; Mike Bernhagen; Bernard "Bud" Hammes, PhD, faculty; Linda Briggs, MS, MA, RN, faculty; Bruce Agneberg, MD; George M. Lange, MD, FACP; and Bruce Weiss, MD, MPH. Not pictured are Ben Adams, JD; Tim Bartholow, MD; Joyce Hart Smerick; Tim Jessick, DO; Molli Rolli, MD; and Tosha Wetterneck, MD, MS, FACP.



ect of this magnitude, Respecting Choices Director Bernard (Bud) Hammes, PhD, told attendees at the kick-off event September 24. "We have to change what we do in health care," he said. "It starts with a shared vision, and that's what the Wisconsin Medical Society is doing. It's much more powerful to do this as a collaborative effort."

A Team Approach

Hammes added that it's appropriate for the Society to lead this project because physicians are essential to its success. During training, physicians will learn the importance of best practices for initiating an advance care conversation and referring patients to a trained facilitator—a registered nurse, social worker, or other health care professional. The basic role of physicians is to:

- Initiate planning discussions/referrals.
- Review written plans that have been entered into the medical record.
- Make plans more specific as patient's health condition changes.
- Convert plans into orders when appropriate.

"Facilitators are not replacing physicians," Hammes said. "They are assisting physicians in having the conversation and creating a plan. Facilitators are trained to connect patients back to physicians whenever necessary."

Hammes emphasized the importance of a team approach with clearly defined roles and responsibilities as well as proper preparation and training (including process and workflow development). Advance care planning is about understanding, reflection and discussion, he said, and it's a process that requires patient-centered communication skills and defined roles.

"Depending on available resources, interest, and expertise, each organization will select individuals for the advance care planning team," he said. "Once selected, each team member must understand his or her responsibilities and become competent to fulfill them. They also must understand the expectations of their fellow team members."

As a member of the Systems Engineering Initiative for Patient Safety at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Dr Wetterneck stud-

ies quality and productivity improvement to improve patient care. "Honoring Choices Wisconsin is about shaping professional behavior and redesigning workflows to improve patient care," she said.

A geriatrician, Dr Lange is confident physicians, other health care professionals, and community members in large urban cities and small rural areas are ready – and in many cases, eager—for Honoring Choices Wisconsin. "It's not about one decision over another or a choice that cannot be changed," he said. "It's about having conversations so that physicians know patients' wishes and can respect their choices. These are very personal conversations that can be difficult to start but more often than not, patients—and their families—welcome the opportunity to talk about their care."



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