

Live Healthy and Be Well!

“End of life issues and care – make a wish, or five”

This issue will publish at the beginning of springtime, and I know how beautiful it is around here this time of the year with new life springing up all around. Let’s all get out and enjoy it – plenty to do here to enjoy our area and stay healthy and fit. Try to be active as much as you can, take a walk, garden, mow the lawn, and jog if you can, or work out at a local gym or fitness studio. Do this every day, and it will help you in many ways – reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and even for diabetics - help with sugar control.

So, given all that, I don’t mean to be a “downer,” but recently had an experience I want to share with our readers. This topic concerns end of life issues and care that need to be thought about and planned for ahead of time. While not the most pleasant of topics, this is a conversation you should have with your family and your doctor at some point, and even involve an attorney or notary, if need be, to ensure your wishes are properly documented and able to be followed when the time comes.

We recently helped take care of a patient who had an unfortunate but terminal diagnosis. Working with a team of different doctors, we were set to provide the best possible care for the best possible outcome, all the while believing in the power of faith. The patient became ill and was hospitalized, we hoped for just a short time for a “tune up,” and then to get back home to have some good quality time. We were working with several groups and agencies to insure that could happen smoothly, and the patient indicated that is what they wanted to do. We thought we had plenty of time to do all this and get everything arranged for care at home to enjoy time there with family and friends. But, while still in the hospital, the patient took a turn for the worse and God called them home. At the end, the patient was not really “with it” enough to help us with planning for how to take care of things, and what to do with the estate. It turns out the patient had a good amount of financial resources, but no one had the authority to write a check or use these funds. Also, this person had not designated anyone to be able to act and make healthcare decisions in the case of debilitating illness.

In the United States, a “living will” is a document that you make while living that lays out your plan for healthcare should you become unable to participate. To be most effective, it needs to be paired with a “Healthcare Power of Attorney” to designate who will be able to make decisions for you if you cannot do so yourself. In addition, you should have a “will” which describes what to do with your finances and property. If there is no will to guide the disposition of your estate, the government may have more influence in this decision than you want them to, even though you may have had intentions for your family to inherit.

We are fortunate that Georgia is one of 42 states that recognizes “The Five Wishes.” This single document actually combines a living will with a healthcare power of attorney. It has been called “the advance directive with heart and soul.” In brief, it covers the topics of 1) Who do I want to make decisions for me when I cannot?; 2) What medical treatments do I want or not want?; 3) How comfortable do I want to be?; 4) How do I want people to treat me?; and 5) What do I want my loved ones to know? This document can be filled out by you in your own handwriting and

notarized to become an official document in the State of Georgia. For more info, and to get started making your wishes, check out this website: <https://agingwithdignity.org/Georgia> to order a copy, or ask your Provider if they might have access to this document to give you a copy.

I also cannot say enough good things about hospice care for yourself or a loved one who may be nearing the end of life, and wants to do so with dignity and stay in their own home. Many people seem to think that *hospice* means “pulling the plug,” or “throwing in the towel,” but this is not the case at all. A hospice team can provide compassionate care and acts as a support system not just for the patient, but for the whole family. And, one good thing to know is that if the patient improves, hospice can always be revoked. Or, if you change your mind at any time – hospice can adjust and revoke, or even provide inpatient care at a local hospital, should that be what is best for you, your loved one under care, or the family situation.

So, good things to do now are to get “The Five Wishes” book, fill it out, have it notarized, and put it with your important documents. Have a good, frank discussion with your provider and your family about what is in your “Five Wishes” book, and make sure they understand. If you get in a situation where you think hospice might help – get a referral and, at least, talk to them – you will not be sorry. Don’t be like many I have heard, who when they finally got hospice on board, later said “I wish we’d done that sooner!” Plan now for what happens later – that is not the time to be having these serious talks – it is time to be with family and to be getting ready to go Home.

We really do enjoy hearing from you with any questions, concerns, or ideas for future columns and/or health and wellness related issues for the *Georgia Mountain Laurel*. Please send an email to [rabundoctor@gmail.com](mailto:rabundoctor@gmail.com), or call us at 706-782-3572, and we will be sure to consider your input. This and previous articles can be now be found on the web at [www.rabundoctor.com](http://www.rabundoctor.com) in an archived format. If you use Twitter, then follow us for health tips and wellness advice @rabundoctor. Until next time, live healthy and be well!