

# Elder Law Section Board



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## ***Wisconsin Residents Urged to Plan Emergency Healthcare Decisions Now***

**April 9, 2008** – Who will make your medical decisions when you can't? The State Bar of Wisconsin is joining forces with the Wisconsin Hospital Association and other national, state and community organizations to highlight the importance of answering that question now. "Planning healthcare decision-making now can make all the difference to you and your family during a medical emergency," notes Atty. Benjamin M. Adams, a member of the Bar's Elder Law Section.

Adams urges Wisconsin residents to participate in National Healthcare Decisions Day (NHDD) on April 16, 2008 to prepare for eventual end-of-life treatment options by talking about their wishes with family, friends and healthcare providers, and by executing written advance directives.

To help guide residents through this process, the Bar is making copies of guidebook entitled *A Gift to Your Family* available for a free download on its website through April 30, 2008 at <https://www.wisbar.org/lifeplan>. It is also available in Spanish.

"Under Wisconsin law competent adults have the right to control decisions about their future medical care, including the right to accept or refuse treatment, and the right to be an organ and tissue donor," Adams explains, "and a properly completed advance medical directive can provide for substitute decision-making if you become incapacitated." *A Gift to Your Family* will help get the process started by exploring issues surrounding end-of-life decisions, such as power of attorney for health care, living wills, and organ and tissue donation. It also includes Power of Attorney for Health Care (with addendum) and Declaration to Physicians (Living Will) forms. State forms are also available from the state Department of Health and Family Services at its website: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/forms/AdvDirectives/index.htm> and <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/forms/AdvDirectives/ADFormsPOA.htm>

(more)

### **State Bar of Wisconsin**

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In addition to the Wisconsin Hospital Association, the State Bar is partnering with Affinity Health System, ThedaCare, the Fox Cities Family Practice Residency, and the Lawrence University Program in Bioethics, the Fox Cities Family Practice Residency, and the Fox Cities Coalition for End-of-Life Care and Respecting Choices. In addition to Atty. Adams, members of the group promoting NHDD in Wisconsin include Nancy Homburg MD, Jack Swanson MD, Lee Vogel MD, Bernard Hammes PHD, Wayne Winistorfer, Lisa Becker, Jack Stanley PHD and Patrick Boleyn-Fitzgerald PHD.

The value of outreach efforts of this kind is illustrated by the fact that while nationally only about 15% of the population has documented their medical directives, Gunderson Lutheran Medical facility in La Crosse reports that 86% of La Crosse residents already have advance directives in place. This reflects the collaborative efforts of the local medical and legal professionals to make this a priority.

Adams adds that several groups are sponsoring a play in Eagle River called *Now or Later*, about a family struggling with healthcare issues without the benefit of advance care planning. It was written and directed by Rogers Keene of Medford.

“The title of that play really summarizes the central issue here,” Adams concludes. Nancy Homburg, MD, medical director for Affinity Health System’s Palliative Care program adds, “We hope that the Wisconsin Initiative for National Healthcare Decisions Day will motivate many more people in Wisconsin to have thoughtful conversations about their healthcare decisions and complete legally appropriate advance directives to make their wishes known now so that fewer families and healthcare providers will have to struggle with difficult healthcare decisions later.”

For more information about National Healthcare Decision Day and related materials, please visit:

- National Healthcare Decisions Day: [www.nationalhealthcaredecisionsday.org](http://www.nationalhealthcaredecisionsday.org);
- Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups Elder Law Center: <http://www.cwag.org/legal/guardian-support/?Id=64>;
- Wisconsin Hospital Association: <http://www.wha.org/disasterPreparedness/powerofattorney.aspx>;
- American Bar Association: <http://www.abanet.org/aging/toolkit/>.

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