

November 2009 MOLST Update

In our family, we have an unusual Thanksgiving tradition that has nothing to do with food or football, but rather personal beliefs, values and expectations. It's our annual family discussion of issues related to Advance Care Planning. It's a tradition I encourage you to adopt.

Advance Care Planning involves completing the necessary legal forms to document your health care preferences, as well as legally designate someone to represent you during a medical crisis when you can't speak for yourself. In New York State these forms include a Health Care Proxy and a Living Will.

Years ago my family started this tradition on Thanksgiving because it's an American holiday that just about everyone celebrates, attracting family members from far and wide. While at first you might think it's morbid to discuss such issues at a family gathering, we've found it brings us closer. We have candid discussions about what our wishes are for end-of-life care. We each gain peace of mind, knowing our own wishes will be honored; we know exactly how our loved ones want to be treated if they can't speak for themselves. It's yet another reason to give thanks.

Here's how our tradition goes: After Thanksgiving dinner and the dishes are cleared, the adults in our family stay at the table, and we review our individual Advance Care Planning documents to make sure they reflect our current feelings. We have blank forms handy in case new documents need to be done and witnessed.

As a medical doctor and health plan administrator with expertise in pain management and end-of-life issues, I'm especially passionate about Advance Care Planning. I recommend that everyone 18 and older complete the legal Advance Care Planning forms and keep them on file with their physician, their lawyer and most importantly, their loved ones.

In New York State in addition to the Health Care Proxy and Living Will, there's a document called Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (MOLST). MOLST is recommended for people with serious or advancing chronic illness and those who want to further define their care wishes by limiting medical interventions or clarifying a request for all medically indicated treatments including resuscitation. The MOLST program is designed to improve the quality of care people receive at the end of life. It is based on effective communication of patient wishes, documentation of medical orders on a brightly colored pink form and a promise by health care professionals to honor these wishes.

I encourage your family to start this Thanksgiving tradition. Let me know if your family starts this tradition or if you have other special times when such discussions take place.

To learn more, download the [Advance Care Planning booklet](#) which includes the New York State Health Care Proxy and Living Will forms, as well as a sample MOLST form.

Watch the Community Conversations on Compassionate Care videos in the [Compassion And Support Video Library](#) to help you learn more! We hope these stories will motivate you to begin the Advance Care Planning process and complete your advance directives with your family.

I wish you and yours a very happy and blessed Thanksgiving.

Thank you,

Pat

Patricia A. Bomba M.D., F.A.C.P.
Vice President and Medical Director, Geriatrics
Chair, National Healthcare Decisions Day NYS Coalition
www.CompassionAndSupport.org