

# Help the NHS with a 'living will'

As professionals with expertise in end-of-life care, we are familiar with death and dying: they are part of our daily lives. Now the Covid-19 pandemic has made them everyone's business.

Medical professionals are having to make difficult decisions, often with scant knowledge of our patients' wishes. And because of quarantine measures our patients may not even have their loved ones at their side to advocate for them.

These decisions will be made much easier for us, our patients and their families if we have a clear sense of their preferences for treatment well before they find themselves in a crowded intensive care unit.

Expertise in advance care planning for the end of life must become part of every health and care professional's toolkit during this pandemic, and it must go far beyond knowing the procedure for "do not attempt CPR" notices. The health secretary, NHS England and Public Health England must take measures to ensure professionals at all levels have the skills they need to sensitively but confidently "have the conversation" with

patients about their wishes for the end of life and, crucially, to support them to record those wishes in an advance care plan that is available to medical staff.

This could include, if a patient wishes, a refusal of treatment in certain situations, also known as a living will; a statement recording priorities for care; and the appointment of a trusted person to make healthcare decisions for them if they become unable to. The necessary documents are available online from charities such as Compassion in Dying (see [mydecisions.org.uk](http://mydecisions.org.uk)).

Such planning enables us to act in the best interests of patients and allows resources to be more easily directed to those who most need and want them.

*Dame Barbara Monroe, chairwoman, Compassion in Dying; Dr Alison Pittard, dean, Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine; Professor Ravi Mahajan, president, Royal College of Anaesthetists; Professor Martin Green, chief executive, Care England; Dr Richard Smith, former editor, BMJ; Professor Adrian Newland, former president, Royal College of Pathologists; Dr Raymond Tallis; Professor Sir Sam Everington; and 28 more. For a full list see [sundaytimes.co.uk/letters](http://sundaytimes.co.uk/letters)*

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