

AMERICAN GERIATRICS SOCIETY (AGS)

Statement Regarding the Value of Advance Care Planning

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The American Geriatrics Society (AGS), an organization representing health professionals who care for the sickest, and most vulnerable elders, believes that conversations focused on advance care planning are an essential part of ensuring that our older Americans receive high-quality, patient-centered care. Our membership of over 6,000 geriatrics health care professionals, with their focus on ensuring maximal independence, function, and quality of care, have a deep understanding and first-hand experience of the importance of ensuring that the wishes of those they care for are respected.

We believe that frank and open discussions help healthcare professionals, and families understand an individual's care preferences. Research has shown that patients who have had such discussions receive end of life care that is congruent with their preferences.¹ Such conversations are key in preserving patient dignity and maximizing comfort at the end of life. Research has also shown that advance care planning improves care and quality of life for patients at end of life, improves patient and family satisfaction and reduces stress, anxiety, and depression for family caregivers and other relatives.^{2,3}

For frail elders, advance care planning for end-of-life preferences is particularly important – ensuring that families, the physician, and other healthcare team members understand and act in accordance with a person's wishes when it comes to the type of care that he or she would like at the end of life. Such conversations are focused on understanding what the values of the person being cared for are and helping families and healthcare professionals to make choices that are consistent with those values if the frail elder is unable to participate in decisions about his or her own care.

It is the position of AGS that national and state policies should encourage patients and those who care for them to engage in advance care planning discussions. It is only through such discussions that health professionals can understand the care choices that a patient would make. Voluntary advance planning discussions can facilitate informed decisions prior to the onset of a serious illness, or a medical crisis and can guide families and health professionals through decisions they may need to make on behalf of their loved ones.

Recently, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) reversed its decision to include voluntary advance care planning consultation as part of the annual wellness exam for Medicare beneficiaries. CMS cited procedural reasons for rescinding the regulatory guideline, noting the need for additional public comment. AGS is disappointed by CMS' reversal given the tremendous power advance care planning discussions have in ensuring that we are delivering care which is in accordance with individual preferences.

AGS strongly encourages older adults to engage in conversations and consultations relative to advance care planning and end-of-life care preferences with their healthcare professionals and their family members. We believe in the value of person-directed advance care planning and urge the Administration and Congress to adopt policies that will incentivize all Americans to make their own informed healthcare choices.

¹ Silveira MJ, Kim SY, Langa KM. Advance directives and outcomes of surrogate decision making before death. *N Engl J Med*. 2010 Apr 1;362(13):1211-8.

² Detering KM, Hancock AD, Reade MC, Silvester W. The Impact of Advance Care Planning on End of Life Care in Elderly Patients: Randomised Controlled Trial. *British Medical Journal*, 2010; 340:c1345.

³ Schwartz CE, Wheeler HB, Hammes B, Basque N, et al. Early intervention in planning end-of-life care with ambulatory geriatric patients: results of a pilot trial. *Arch Intern Med*. 2002 Jul 22;162(14):1611-8.

THE AMERICAN GERIATRICS SOCIETY

WHO WE ARE

The American Geriatrics Society (AGS) is a not-for-profit organization of over 6,000 health professionals devoted to improving the health, independence and quality of life of all older people. The Society provides leadership to healthcare professionals, policy makers and the public by implementing and advocating for programs in patient care, research, professional and public education, and public policy.

STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING OUR VISION

The AGS works to advance the field of geriatrics, to promote preventative care, with emphasis on care management and care coordination to help older patients maintain functional independence and improve their overall quality of life. We aim to achieve our vision by:

- Expanding the geriatrics knowledge base through initiatives that promote basic, clinical and health services research regarding the health of older adults.
- Increasing the number of healthcare professionals employing the principles of geriatric medicine when caring for older persons by:
 - supporting the expansion of geriatric education in all applicable health professions
 - promoting the development of systems of care and practice redesign that facilitates the provision of quality geriatric care
- Recruiting physicians and other healthcare professionals into careers in geriatrics through efforts to ensure that geriatrics is a viable, attractive, and rewarding career choice.
- Guiding public policy through advocacy so policy supports improved health and healthcare for seniors.
- Raising public awareness of the need for high-quality, culturally sensitive geriatric healthcare so an empowered, proactive public can help drive improvements in the quality of care that older persons receive.