



**National Healthcare Decisions Day 2017**  
Chris Herman, MSW, LICSW  
Senior Practice Associate  
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The mission of **National Healthcare Decisions Day** (NHDD) is to enhance understanding of, and participation in, advance care planning. Now in its 10th year, NHDD 2017 will be a **weeklong event**, observed from April 16 through 22. This year's theme matches that of the 2016 observance: *It's always too early, until it's too late.* (Can't take action during NHDD week? Use this information as a resource for educating your clients and colleagues throughout and beyond the month of April.)

NHDD emphasizes that advance care planning is an ongoing process of reflection and communication, not limited to completion of advance directives. Best practice is for any adult with health care decision-making capacity to engage in advance care planning before a crisis occurs and to reevaluate health care decisions on a regular basis. Frequent conversations with health care agents and other members of the health care team can help to clarify whether one's goals and choices have changed. This is especially important when a condition exacerbates or a new diagnosis is received; however, NHDD provides an excellent catalyst for such reevaluation, no matter a person's health condition.

#### THE SOCIAL WORK ROLE

Advance care planning is rooted in values and relationships. Social workers excel at helping clients to identify what matters to them and to communicate those values with people whom they trust. Understanding health care information is essential to effective advance care planning. Yet, many individuals and families do not have a clear understanding of the health conditions they face or of their health care options. Clients may have difficulty processing health care information because of emotional responses to crisis situations, for example—or because the information has not been presented in a manner that is understandable to them or congruent with their communication style. Social workers are adept at identifying and mitigating such barriers to informed decision making, thereby advocating for clients' self-determination.

Thus, social workers play an integral role in facilitating advance care planning conversations. Drawing on health care information available within interdisciplinary teams and from trusted sources, social workers also help individuals and families to understand and complete advance directives—and, when appropriate to an individual's condition, POLST (Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment) Paradigm forms and forms addressing resuscitation or intubation.

#### PROMOTING ADVANCE CARE PLANNING IN YOUR COMMUNITY

NHDD organizers provide multiple resources to help you spread the word about NHDD and advance care planning:

- [Information about advance care planning](#)
- [NHDD activity suggestions](#)
- [NHDD tools and materials](#)
- [Map to find or list an NHDD event in your community](#)

Please use #NHDD to follow National Healthcare Decision Day developments on Twitter and in your own online communications about NHDD.

#### RELATED RESOURCES FROM NASW

- September 2015 [comments to CMS](#) advocating for Medicare reimbursement for advance care planning services
- January 2016 [NASW News article](#) summarizing CMS's response
- Practice Perspectives: [Reexamining Advance Care Planning](#)
- Legal Issue of the Month: [Social Workers and Advance Directives](#)
- Hospice and palliative care [practice tools, resources, and announcements](#)
- [Standards for Palliative & End of Life Care](#)
- Statement for the May 2016 [National Academy of Medicine meeting](#), Assessing Progress in End-of-Life & Serious Illness Care
- Recommendations to the [2015 White House Conference on Aging](#), promoting advance care planning as part of healthy aging
- [Advanced Practice Specialty Credentials](#) (hospice and palliative social work, health care, aging, and more)
- Continuing education (CE):
  - June 2017 virtual conference, [Aging Through the Social Work Lens](#) (includes sessions on palliative care and health care)
  - November 2016 Specialty Practice Sections Webinar (archive), [The Role of Social Workers in Goals of Care Conversations with Seriously Ill Patients](#)
  - [Other national CE programs](#)
  - [Chapter-level CE programs](#)
- [Specialty Practice Sections](#) (aging, health, and more)
- [Consumer-friendly information](#) about advance care planning
- [Find a Social Worker](#): online databases

## RELATED RESOURCES DEVELOPED OR OFFERED IN COLLABORATION WITH NASW

- National Consensus Project for Quality Palliative Care, [Clinical Practice Guidelines for Quality Palliative Care \(3rd ed.\)](#)
- Leadership Council of Aging Organizations, [Advanced Care, Hospice, and End of Life Principles](#)
- Joint Commission consumer brochures addressing [serious illness and palliative care](#) and [memory problems and dementia](#)

## OTHER RELATED RESOURCES

- Consumer-friendly information about advance care planning from the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization: [CaringInfo](#); [Moments of Life](#)
- [The Five Wishes](#) (Aging with Dignity)
- [Free archived webinars](#) on advance care planning, the POLST Paradigm in nursing homes, end-of-life planning, and ethics in end-of-life decision making, offered by the University of Iowa School of Social Work
- National Academy of Medicine report, [Dying in America: Improving Quality and Honoring Individual Preferences Near the End of Life](#), and associated activities and resources
- [Social Work Network in Palliative and End-of-Life Care electronic mailing list](#) (Mount Sinai Beth Israel, New York City)
- [Social Work Hospice and Palliative Care Network](#)
- [Center to Advance Palliative Care](#)