

*Editorial***TERRI SCHIAVO AND FIVE WISHES**

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Editorial Board Member

My call to RNO members as Executive Director of RNO is to get active in your community. My challenge to all of you is to educate your community members about health and health care issues. Here's a great way to take a national event and bring it to the local level.

Terri Schiavo was in the news when a federal judge refused to order the reinsertion of her feeding tube March 22, 2005. The parents of this woman with brain-damage filed a notice of appeal. To me, this is what Five Wishes is all about. What did Terri want when she was able to speak for herself? What do you want when you can no longer speak for yourself and who will speak for you?

Five Wishes began after Jim Towey was inspired by Mother Teresa to seek a way for patients and their families to cope with the decisions that must be faced due to serious illness by planning ahead. Five Wishes Living Will is a tool provided by Aging with Dignity to help persons communicate what they want done if they become seriously ill.

If you were seriously ill and couldn't speak for yourself, who would make decisions about your health care for you? Would the person making the decisions know and fulfill your wishes? Have you had these discussions with your parents, your spouse, and your children?

With the news of Terri Schiavo's battle and recent death in our thoughts I recommend taking time to have these discussions and reaffirming your wishes. This tool talks not only about your medical wishes but your personal, emotional, and spiritual wishes. It's a user-friendly tool. You can discuss it with your family and health care provider.

Five Wishes helps you determine five areas of decision making that arise with serious illness. 1) The person I want to make health care decisions for me when I can't, 2) The kind of medical treatment I want or don't want, 3) How comfortable I want to be, 4) How I want people to treat me, and 5) What I want my loved ones to know.

You may want your parent, spouse, sibling, or friend to speak on your behalf and make your decisions. (Note in Colorado, the person must be 21 years of age.) You decide.

You may want life support treatment to include full resuscitation such as a breathing tube, feeding tube, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, antibiotics, or not. You decide.

You may want to have specific comfort needs addressed such as keeping your lips and mouth moist, being pain free even though it makes you drowsy, having your hair and teeth brushed, having music played, or not. You decide.

You may want lots of visitors, church members to stop by, photos of loved ones within your sight, to die in your own home if possible, or not. You decide.

You may want to share thoughts with your friends and family that you haven't addressed before you were sick. Asking for forgiveness, peace making, sharing your love,

determining that you want to be buried or cremated, noting what songs or readings you'd like at your memorial service, or not. You decide.

Your making the decision will relieve the burden on the person called upon to make these decisions for you. It is a difficult task for them and they are dealing with their own grief and loss issues. Making your decisions known will help them make these difficult decisions much easier.

The form can be ordered on line at www.agingwithdignity.org or by calling 1-888-594-7437. The form is \$5.00 for an individual copy and may be photocopied after being filled out for your health care provider and loved ones.

Here's an example of what you can do locally to help your community learn more about with health issues. As a parish nurse I held a community presentation that included the Five Wishes form, as well as other offerings. Women from the Newcomer's Club and three of the churches brought soups and salads to entice people to come. I also submitted this information to the local newspapers and radio stations.

The form was offered at the Parish Nursing Fund Raiser on Sunday, April 10, 2005. In addition to Five Wishes, Cliff Stuart, Estes Park Medical Center Pharmacist, was available to review medications for drug-to-drug interactions called a "Brown Bag" session because you bring all your meds (prescriptions and nonprescription) in a brown bag for review. The Surgeon General's Family Medical History Portrait was also provided along with information about Parish Nursing - what it is. A good will offering to benefit the EP Parish Nursing program was matched by Thrivent Financial. The EP Interfaith Council endorses the EP Parish Nursing Program.

I hope you'll get active in your community and spread your nursing knowledge to help laypersons gain a better understanding of health and healthcare.