

Books

Marjorie Sirridge

when the patient and the physician join together in a cooperative effort to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the health care system.

Physicians should and will remain the patient's advocate during these changing times, and patients will learn to be wiser health care consumers.

The HMO has stimulated increased health care education for patients and increased the patient's awareness of responsibility for his/her own health care costs. These advances will ultimately strengthen the American health care system and lead to the discovery of many new health care innovations, providing a better product for the consumer's dollar.

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The Physician and the Hopelessly Ill Patient: Legal, Medical, and Ethical Guidelines.

Published by the Society for the Right to Die, 1985

This extremely useful handbook is the culmination of a project sponsored by the Society for the Right to Die. The project began with a conference in which ten physicians met to discuss the physician's responsibility toward hopelessly ill patients and from which came an article which was published in 1984 in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

This article is reproduced in Section I of the book. It addresses both the patient's and the physician's role in decision-making, emphasizing that the patient has the right to make decisions about medical treat-

ment, but that the principal obstacle to the patient's effective participation is lack of competence. As a patient's ability to make decisions becomes progressively decreased, the relationship with the physician becomes increasingly important. Communication with the patient and the patient's family remains the cornerstone of the physician's role.

The physician's role, as outlined in the article, is primarily to provide diagnosis and prognosis, to offer treatment choices and explain their implications, and to assume responsibility for recommending a course of treatment. This role in treatment decisions is the most difficult because of personal bias, fear of legal liability and, more recently, consideration of monetary costs to society. The article outlines reasonable approaches for a variety of situations in which physicians share the responsibility for deciding whether to forego life-sustaining treatment for the hopelessly ill.

Section II deals with specific questions which relate to the legal aspects of allowing persons to die. Examples of these questions are: What is the legal basis of the patient's right to refuse treatment? What is the preferred method for determining what the patient wants?

Section III gives a state-by-state summary of living will legislation and case law, which can provide a context for individual decisions that must be made. Appendices include statutory citations, case citations, general form for living will declarations, current opinions of the Ethical and Judicial Council of the American Medical Association, and "Do Not Resuscitate" guidelines.

This handbook is concise and clear, with attention given to laws in particular states. It would be a helpful addition to any physician's library.

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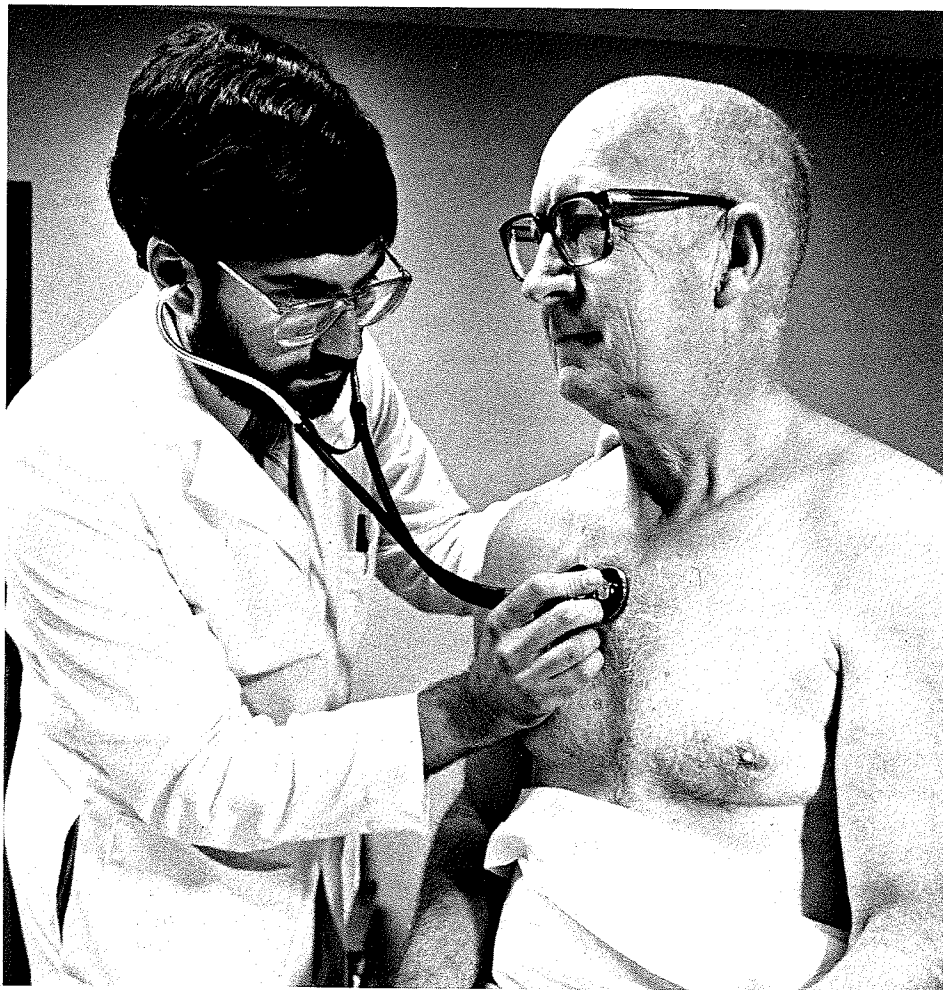


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