Advance Directives. International Library of Ethics, Law, and the New Medicine 54. Edited by Peter Lack, Nikola Biller-Andorno, and Susanne Brauer. Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer, 2014. 213 pp. \$139.99. ISBN 978-94-007-7376-9.

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In the early 1990s, having been involved with hospice long enough to realize the importance of attending an international conference on the topic, I sat in a lecture hall listening to Dame Cicely Saunders talking about hospice and the journey with her beloved St. Christopher's Hospice. At the time, I was so impressed that someone who had accomplished so much, from my relatively inexperienced perspective, was so focused on how much more needed to be done. Reading *Advance Directives* by Lack, Biller, and Brauer will, I suspect, affect many readers in the same way. *Advance Directives* provides a marvelous review of the evolution of a change in medical philosophy and practice.

Patient preferences, regarding medical care for people as they near the final stages of life, have been an important focus for medical practitioners and health policy makers in recent decades. This simple concept of bringing the patient into the decision-making process is in stark contrast to the paternalistic practice of medicine in years prior. Early chapters of this book capture nicely the history of advance directives and their different developmental pathways in various parts of the world. Even experienced readers will be surprised by the complexity and variability in advance-directive practices and laws throughout the United States and Europe.

The chapter authors and editors delve into the social, medical, legal, and political perspectives surrounding advance directives. As one reads further into the slightly more than two hundred pages of text, *Advance Directives* becomes more clearly defined. One, also, finds acknowledgment that not everyone is dealing with the same definition, least of all the diverse legal systems of many developed nations.

Advance Directives fills an obvious void in the literature on this important topic. The editors make it clear that the seeds for this endeavor were sown during the international conference titled "Advance Directives: Towards a Coordinated European Perspective?" hosted by the Institute of Biomedical

Ethics at the University of Zürich in 2008. Additionally, there are many references to the 1997 European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (Oviedo convention).

In chapter 2, Professor Marie-Jo Thiel provides a wonderful treatise on the advance-directives approach or challenge to the different philosophical matter of trying to determine how one's present self can anticipate the needs and desires of one's future self. Informed consent information occurs at a period in time and remains static regardless of future events. Medical knowledge, personal growth, and other factors progressive toward the future, at the very least, make the concept more challenging. Whether one's future self, regardless of how cognitively impaired or physically restrained, should be trumped by one's past self makes for an intriguing presentation. The entire premise of an advance directive becomes a metaphysical exercise that may have existential flaws.

There are other noteworthy elements that make *Advance Directives* more comprehensive. For example, an entire chapter (chapter 3 by Dr. Jochen Vollman) addresses the use of advance directives to render psychiatric care. The challenges in this arena can take a different appearance compared to end-of-life decisions despite having clear areas of overlap, for example, decision-making to limit care. Here, paternalism may have the added attraction of safety, not only for the patient but for society as well. The chapter, also, touches on the issue as it relates to individuals incarcerated, although, here, the author clearly has a better understanding of the European environment than the prison system in the United States.

Another welcome chapter (chapter 10 by Settimio Monteverde) deals with another challenge, that is, having frontline healthcare workers adhering to the advance directives. This chapter recognizes that, while establishing advance directives in a clear and accepted fashion may be challenging, implementing those directives cannot be successful unless those who physically render the care are on board. Without specifically stating it, this chapter recognizes that nurses are affected by a variety of factors and caution must be directed to assure that everyone is functioning as a team. If deviation occurs in the field, all of the efforts to assure compliance with advance directives may in themselves be futile. Ms. Monteverde shows a remarkable insight in identifying challenges of morally ambiguous conditions potentially affecting care in the field.

The editors have done an admirable job of including case scenarios where clinicians encounter

dilemmas that are commonly encountered but not easily resolved by legislation. The “rebel proxy” described in chapter 4 will be familiar to anyone who has worked extensively in long-term care and/or hospice. Illustrating the lack of consensus on many issues surrounding advance directives, there even exists some deviation in schools of thought among some of the authors. Chapters 3, 4, and 6 address issues such as competence and use of advance directives in psychiatry and withholding care that is medically futile and how that is defined. Chapter 4 gives a few examples, “where ethics and law collide.” At one point, Professor Olick concludes “‘Futile’ treatment deemed legally required though ethically inappropriate is provided.” Later, in chapter 6, Atkinson and Reilly seem to challenge the notion noting, “nowhere does the law allow a patient to demand a treatment against the advice of a clinician.” While not in direct contradiction, it illustrates the variability in interpretation, especially, when choices are not clear cut with general consensus.

Where the book falls short is in giving guidance on improving the function and acceptance of advance directives, overall, or of any specific elements falling under this broad umbrella. Clearly, there is a need for better definitions of surrogate decision makers and how such individuals are determined. We are given a clear picture of the problems with current laws on the topic. There is, also, outstanding information on the difficulties with living wills, how they are made, when and how they can be changed, and when they should be implemented. Throughout the text, insight is provided on the difficulties that can, and often do, arise during well-intentioned efforts to determine and adhere to a patient’s wishes. Including information to help

people understand advance directives better would be tremendously helpful. Even resources, for example, TheConversationProject.org, Prepareforyour-care.org, or reference to the American College of Physicians resource website, would be a welcome addition to the text.

Later chapters deal with the difficulty of developing consensus among nations, the impact of economic incentives behind advance-directive policy development and advancement, and flaws in legal documents, in particular, living wills. The arguments in multiple chapters, for and against advance directives, alone, make the book a worthwhile endeavor, especially, if one is relatively new to the field.

Was I to give a final piece of advice to the editors for future editions, it would be to include a chapter on the spiritual issues associated with advance directives. Spirituality is considered to be one of the essential factors for successful aging (Ng et al. 2009). The discussion of advance directives cannot be considered comprehensive without weaving this important component into its fabric.

Overall, editors Peter Lack, Nikola Biller-Andorno, and Susanne Brauer have put together a wonderful compendium of information in *Advance Directives*. It is a must for any library that carries information on advance directives and for anyone seeking comprehensive discussion on the topic.

Reference

- Ng, T. P., B. F. Broekman, M. Niti, X. Gwee, and E. H. Kua. 2009. “Determinants of Successful Aging Using a Multidimensional Definition among Chinese Elderly in Singapore.” *The American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 17, no. 5: 407–16. doi: 10.1097/JGP.0b013e31819a808e.