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Elder Law Minute

Importance of Advance Directives

Recently, I have noticed a new and troubling phenomenon. I have three male clients currently who are, or were in LTAC facilities. An LTAC is a Long-Term Acute Care hospital.

Client 1 is an 82 year old man who was hospitalized to have a tumor removed from his lung. Following that procedure he had an aortic aneurism. He has been hospitalized since December 7, 2008. While in the hospital he has developed pneumonia and every kind of hospital based infection.

Client 2 is a 67 year old man who had surgery to clear a blocked carotid artery in January 2009. He developed pneumonia following the surgery and contracted all of the hospital based infections.

Client 3 is a 59 year old male who suffered an aneurism in August 2008. While hospitalized he developed meningitis.

All three of these gentlemen were on respirators, have had tracheotomies and are receiving nutrition through feeding tubes. They cannot speak due to the trache, and they are connected to all kinds of catheters, tubes and pumps.

The 67 year old was able to transition to a nursing home after 6 weeks in various hospitals. However, it was very difficult to find one that would take him due to his complicated medical situation. The others are stuck in LTACs for the foreseeable future.

I bring this to your attention to emphasize the importance of taking Advance Directives for Health Care seriously. These three men are living their worst nightmare. The families are faced with an unbelievable burden. I urge you to counsel your clients on these possibilities every few years and to keep their Advance Directives up to date.

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