



Respecting wishes ...

At the age of 81, Maria had had a series of strokes that robbed her of all mobility. Her husband, Henry, age 83 had been caring for Maria at home.

One Saturday evening at home, Henry was holding Maria's hand and she told Henry that she was too tired to go on. Later that evening, Maria quietly slipped into a coma. After discussion with their children, Henry felt they could no longer care for Maria at home and thought about palliative care. When they called the Emergency Department, they were advised to bring Maria in and the neurologist would evaluate her.

When the neurologist came in, he seemed surprised when Henry requested Maria be made as comfortable as possible but not to provide any aggressive treatment. The physician asked if Maria had put anything in writing regarding her wishes. Henry said no, but during their 50 years of marriage, they had discussed it at length and he knew her wishes intimately.

Again, the physician stressed the importance of having something in writing. Henry replied "Son, if you are in an accident tonight on your way home from this hospital, if your life is affected the way my wife's is right now, do you have your wishes in writing? Does your wife know your feelings about being left in this state? Have you even discussed it with her? Please don't tell me what you know. Listen to what I know"

From that point until Maria's death, Henry and his family received care in keeping with her wishes. They believed that Maria had a good death.

Have you discussed this with those closest to you?