

'End-of-life' issues are very important

Speaking as one who in the past several years has lost a mother-in-law, a father, and a mother, I have come to realize how very important "end-of-life" issues can be. Each of these individuals had different outlooks on life and death, and as family members, we strived to honor the wishes of each.

My mother-in-law bravely battled cancer and the treatments which accompany that battle. After several rounds of chemotherapy, she, her doctor and family agreed that the battle was finally over.

We are so thankful for the extra years that the aggressive treatment gave her, but in the end she said "no more" and became a hospice patient. She was able to make and implement this decision.

My father was as healthy as a horse, walking several miles a day at age 84. He suddenly became very ill and was hospitalized. He was diagnosed with cancer.

His illness hit so quickly and advanced so rapidly that he was incapable of making his own decisions, and the doctors turned to family to make end-of-life choices.

My mother suffered from Alzheimer's disease. In her younger years she talked about her wishes for end-of-life. We are so thankful she did, because near the end she was incapable of voicing or even

understanding her choices.

People who have gone through the death of a loved one know what a stressful time it is. Nothing makes it easy, but trying to make medical decisions while you are grieving makes the situation even more difficult.

And throw into this mix differing viewpoints from various family members, and you have gone from a sad, trying situation to a nearly impossible one.

Health care professionals and family members want to respect the wishes of each individual; however, sometimes the individual cannot speak for him or herself. That is why Advance Health Care Directives are so important before an individual becomes incapacitated.

Wyoming Advance Health Care Directives are available, free of charge, online from the Wyoming Department of Health at <http://health.wyo.gov/Media.aspx?mediaId=2699>, or go the Wyoming Department of Health Web site, click on "forms," and scroll



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down to "Advance Health Care Directives."

Copies may also be picked up at the Sheridan Senior Center or Sheridan Memorial Hospital.

These forms are made available to the citizens of Wyoming because you have the right to give instructions about your own health care if you are unable to speak for yourself at that time.

The Wyoming Health Care Directive Form allows you to: designate an agent to make health care decisions for you, choose when the agent's authority becomes effective, and direct which medical procedures you want and don't want.

The directive provides for people who do not want life-sustaining measures taken if they are terminal, as well as people who wish to prolong life as long as possible. The choice is yours.

Another directive that is available to Wyoming citizens is the Comfort One bracelet. This is a "Do Not Resuscitate"

directive that must be discussed with your physician.

If you choose not to be resuscitated if your heart should stop, and your doctor has signed off on your decision, you send the completed document to the offices of the Wyoming Emergency Medical Services. For a fee, you will receive the Comfort One bracelet, which identifies you to emergency responders as a person who chooses not to be resuscitated.

If you have a Comfort One bracelet, emergency responders will provide comfort care and support to the patient and family. Forms for the Comfort One Bracelet may be obtained from the Sheridan Senior Center or Sheridan Memorial Hospital.

As difficult as it may be, the time to discuss these issues is before something happens. And here's hoping no one has to use his Advance Directives for a long, long time!

Diane Feather is director of in-home services at the Sheridan Senior Center. This program serves approximately 170 people in the community each month.

Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.