

Guidelines for Supporting Those with Medical Needs

Assisting baptized publishers to complete the *Advance Decision to Refuse Specified Medical Treatment* document:

Offer to assist baptized publishers, especially the elderly, in completing an *Advance Decision* document (ADD). They should prayerfully consider their decisions and then carefully read and follow the instructions on the document. Adhering to the instructions helps to avoid unnecessary challenges to the legal validity of their ADD. Remind them to make several photocopies of their completed ADD. They should provide copies to (1) the witnesses who signed the document, (2) their doctor (GP), and (3) their congregation secretary. Additionally, they may wish to keep a copy with their will, other important documents, and with family members. Parents should use the *Identity Card (ic)* for their minor children.

Unbaptized publishers can write out their own wishes in line with the December 2004 issue of *Our Kingdom Ministry*, page 7.

The secretary should be sure to provide newly baptized publishers with the following materials:

- *Advance Decision* document (*dpa-E Bi 1/16*)
- “How Do I View Blood Fractions and Medical Procedures Involving My Own Blood?” (*kmi11/06*)—November 2006 *Our Kingdom Ministry* insert*
- “Are You Ready to Face a Faith-Challenging Medical Situation?” (*kmi3/91*)—March 1991 *Our Kingdom Ministry* insert*

*Available from the “Forms” section of jw.org

Give special attention and offer assistance to the following individuals:

Pregnant sisters: A *Care Plan for Women in Labour Refusing a Blood Transfusion* should be requested from the local HLC. It is helpful to supply the following details via email: the sister’s name and contact information (including email), your contact information, the name of your congregation, the name of the hospital she will be attending, the expected date of delivery, and details regarding her husband’s spiritual status.

Legal guidelines for the UK suggest that when there has been an unanticipated change to a person’s life (for example pregnancy), this might affect the validity of an advance directive. Therefore, please encourage the sister to complete a new *Advance Decision* document.

Since complications can arise throughout pregnancy, review with the couple the points contained in the document *How Parents Can Protect Their Children From Misuse of Blood* (S-55) and in the article “Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies” from the November 2009 issue of *Awake!* The S-55 information sheet and the *Awake!* article are available in the “Forms” section of jw.org.

Children: Clinicians and hospitals will not usually provide assurances that they will not use blood if they deem it clinically indicated, when treating young children, infants, or premature babies. When consulted, the HLC can assist in locating cooperative doctors and help parents handle matters in a reasonable, yet realistic way. You should review with parents the points contained in the S-55 information sheet (see previous point) and share with them the December 2005 *Our Kingdom Ministry* article “Could Your Child Make a Mature Decision?”

Older ones: Please ensure that our dear older brothers and sisters have appropriate support if they face medical treatment or hospitalization. Always maintain a copy of their ADD in the congregation file. Family members in the truth should keep copies of elderly publishers’ ADD, including previously completed ones. This is invaluable in establishing their personally held views should they start suffering from any form of dementia.

Those taking anticoagulation medication: The possible need to counteract the action of these drugs in an emergency is an important consideration. In the case of warfarin (Coumadin®), preferred reversal agents contain blood fractions. Newer anticoagulants offer less inconveniences and complications, but some of these drugs may not have an available agent to counteract their effects on bleeding. These effects could be life threatening in an emergency, and doctors may want to prescribe a blood transfusion. Brothers and sisters should be aware of these facts and decide accordingly.—Prov. 22:3.

Those diagnosed with any type of cancer: Most treatment plans will include surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, or a combination of these. Anaemia and suppression of blood cell production are highly likely. The HLCs have become increasingly familiar with possible strategies in these difficult conditions and can provide helpful information for our brothers, as well as supporting documents for the treating team, if appropriate.

Contacting the HLC:

In most cases, elders should contact the HLC directly and *only* in behalf of baptized and unbaptized publishers who request help to find a cooperative doctor (either for themselves or for their children) or whose medical condition has led to the threat of a blood transfusion. At times, the elders may determine that it would be best for the patient or family member to contact the HLC directly, especially in emergency situations. (See the letter dated May 2, 2015, to all bodies of elders and the letter dated January 3, 2006, to all congregations.) When contacting the HLC, have the following information available:

- Your congregation name and your telephone number or the name and number of another available elder
- Name, age, congregation and telephone number of the patient
- Spiritual standing of patient and family. Are unbelieving family members involved?
- Name of hospital and treating doctor, and location of patient
- Is a completed ADD available? If not, help the patient complete one immediately
- Specific situation (i.e. what is the HLC being asked to do?)

Provide practical and spiritual support to hospitalized publishers:

Regarding the provision of the HLC and the Patient Support Group (PSG), please remember that this arrangement does not relieve the local elders of their responsibility to visit the sick at home and in hospital.

For elders who serve in a foreign-language group or congregation: Please review the guidelines in our letter dated April 17, 2015.