

Yale study: End-of-life planning often not well communicated

By Register Staff

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NEW HAVEN >> Older adults are not doing a good job of letting their loved ones know of their end-of-life wishes, according to a [Yale School of Medicine](#) study.

The study found both that too many people fail to make plans for end-of-life medical treatment and fail to communicate their wishes clearly, according to a press release.

In the best circumstances, a person making decisions about what kind of medical treatment he or she would prefer as they approach death would choose a surrogate to make sure those wishes are carried out. However, too often, even when advance plans are made, they are not communicated well to the surrogate, the study found.

The study involved a survey of 350 veterans age 55 or older and their surrogates. Surrogates were asked whether the patient wanted to be treated even if that meant serious physical or cognitive impairment or suffering severe pain, the release said.

The survey found that more than 40 percent of the veterans and their surrogates agreed that advanced care planning either had not been done, through a living will or health care proxy, or that the surrogates were not clear about the veterans' wishes, the release said. And only 20 percent of surrogates could say what the veteran's end-of-life decisions were.

"You can't assume advanced care planning achieves the goal of making sure the surrogate understands what the patient wants," said [Dr. Terri Fried](#), a specialist in geriatrics and an author of the study, in the release.

"Planning needs to include a facilitated discussion between the patient and the surrogate to make sure they are hearing each other and talking about things that are important to the patient."

Possible aids to communication include a clinician facilitator or an internet-based tool, the release said. Fried and her colleagues will be investigating the usefulness of such tools next. "The jury is still out on the best way to help people," said Fried in the release.

The study was published March 20 by the [Journal of the American Geriatrics Society](#).