



# CREATIVE CHOICES

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Fall 2008

The newsletter of the Austin Memorial and Burial Information Society (AMBIS), a nonprofit, nonsectarian, educational and consumer association organized to encourage informed planning about end-of-life issues. AMBIS is a member of the Funeral Consumers Alliance.

## How “advance care planning” can meet your needs

By Lamar Hankins, Attorney at Law

Whatever your age, if you are concerned about having your decisions about medical care and the end of life honored, you should use advance directives to do “advance care planning.” These legal instruments are made in advance of need, which is why they are called advance directives.

In Texas, there are three such directives that officially are termed advance directives, but there also are many others that can be executed in advance of need. I term all such legal instruments advance directives.

Beginning with the official advance directives, here is a list of some of the most common and useful directives:

1. Directive to Physicians, Family, and Surrogates (called a Living Will by some)
2. Medical Power of Attorney (MPOA)
3. Out-of-hospital Do-not-resuscitate order (OOH-DNR)
4. Statutory Durable Power of Attorney (for financial decision-making)
5. Appointment of Agent to Control Disposition of Remains
6. Body Disposition Authorization Affidavit

The Directive to Physicians is a document that permits you to express your wishes about extraordinary (often futile) medical efforts near the end of life. It gives doctors,

relatives, and friends a good idea about how you feel about medical care if you have a terminal illness or an irreversible condition which may end your life in the near term. It is an advisory directive. It is not legally binding.

Unlike similar instruments in many states, the official Texas Directive to Physicians includes refusing artificial hydration and nutrition as a treatment. The option to refuse such treatment means that a person can die with minimal pain, which usually can be controlled with medication, and death is not prolonged, often coming within a few days after hydration is discontinued. Severely incapacitating strokes, ALS, dementia, Alzheimer's, and other medical conditions through which a person does not wish to live can be ended if hydration and nutrition are discontinued. Texas's Directive to Physicians allows a person to refuse such treatment.

The Medical Power of Attorney allows you to appoint an agent to make medical decisions for you if you are not able to make them because you have lost the ability to do so, either temporarily (as during a surgery) or permanently (if you become irreversibly mentally incapacitated). It is an essential document for all people to have.

If you do not want attempts made to resuscitate you if your heart stops beating, you may want to have the OOH-DNR order. Often, the weak condition of the individual or

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## AMBIS fund-raising time—please be as generous as you can

This is the annual fund-raising issue of *Creative Choices*. Because of your past generosity AMBIS has been able to help both members and the community at large. The number of AMBIS volunteers has increased along with outreach efforts. More churches, hospice programs, civic groups, service clubs, and individuals have received the information AMBIS provides, and many more are waiting for our educational programs, brochures, and advance planning forms.

Please give what you can today, while it is still on your mind, before we all get involved with the holiday season and forget to send in that donation, which is vital to the success of AMBIS. And don't forget that AMBIS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, charitable organization, which means that your contribution is tax deductible. In addition, it will be used to help others in our community by maintaining an office to which all have access and to produce and purchase the educational materials that so many have found useful in planning for the future and dealing effectively with the deathcare industry. To simplify the donation process, a donation envelope is enclosed.

## AMBIS BRIEFS

### AMBIS Volunteer Report

The newest volunteer to join the team that staffs the AMBIS office is Gary Barnhart. Thanks, Gary, and welcome!

Many thanks to Kathleen Grobe, who continues to do an excellent job of contacting and scheduling the volunteers who staff the office. Kathleen will also attend a workshop, "Volunteer Involvement - A Framework for Decision Makers," sponsored by RSVP and report back to the volunteers at our next meeting.

Frances Gibich and Daesene Willmann attended the RSEA (Retired State Employees Association) annual meeting and Fair and handed out lots of AMBIS materials. Daesene had written an article for the RSEA newsletter about the importance of advance planning and speaking with your loved ones about your wishes.

Thanks to Frances Gibich and Kathy Boas, who were willing to attend the annual AARP Fair, which ended up being cancelled due to the hurricane.

Rodger Ericson, AMBIS Council member, has contacted all the Austin area hospices to ask if they want AMBIS materials. Several hundred AMBIS information sets have been delivered. In October, Roger spoke to staff at one of the hospices as a result of one of his contacts.

Sandy Booth and Donna Belk of Crossings Care Circle, the home funeral group, conducted a well-attended and well-received Home Funeral Workshop September 20. Many thanks to them!

Frances Gibich, a notary, staffs the AMBIS office the 4th Friday of the month. Call the office to schedule notarization of your forms. You can also go to your credit union or bank, which usually have notaries available.

A great big note of thanks to AMBIS members who suggest to others that they join AMBIS. If you want a member brochure to give to someone, call the office and one or more brochures will be mailed to you.

### Advance planning forms

If you need advance planning forms, contact the AMBIS office, or send a SASE to the AMBIS office with a request for the forms. Please specify which forms you want.

### A new body-donation opportunity

A new Anthropological Research Facility at Texas State University—San Marcos is now operational. The 20-acre facility will provide forensic anthropologists a place to study death and decomposition in a variety of scientific settings, and will provide assistance to law enforcement, medical examiners offices, and crime scene investigations. The program is accepting bodies for its research in cooperation with the Texas Willed Body program. For more information about donating your body to the program, contact the Department of Anthropology at 512-245-8272.

## From the President—

**It's that time again:** Annual fund-raising time for AMBIS. Some will understandably say timing of our annual appeal for special financial help from members and friends of AMBIS could be better. Of late, the economy swoons, generating unprecedented government intervention to shore up banks and ease credit problems confronting many consumers nationwide. Still, AMBIS needs support to help us inform and serve Central Texas funeral consumers. There are signs that the infusion of federal funds into the system is working. Also, according to Forbes magazine, Austin is the number-one metropolitan area in the country, based on current economic stability and outlook. But in these times, the help AMBIS provides is needed more than ever.

We urge our friends and members to use the envelope accompanying this newsletter to donate what you can to help AMBIS accomplish its mission as the advocate for funeral consumers in Austin and Central Texas. Your donation is of course tax-deductible. Please be as generous as you can be.

**Advance Planning Workshop.** November 22nd, at 10 a.m. in the AGE Building Dining Room: The AMBIS Semi-annual Advance Care Planning Workshop. One of the most-appreciated special services of AMBIS is this event to help AMBIS members and friends complete advance directives to assure that end-of-life wishes will be met.

Advance Directive forms are provided in the AMBIS membership packet, but AMBIS will provide forms for participants who do not have them. AMBIS membership is of course encouraged but not required of attendees. Importantly, AMBIS provides the services of a Notary Public to notarize those forms requiring notarization. Space is limited, and only those who have made reservations can be assured of participation. To make reservations for the November 22nd Advance Care Planning Workshop, call the AMBIS office, 480-0555. There is no participation fee. Donations are appreciated.

Mark your calendars now for the **AMBIS Annual Meeting** February 22, 2009. The venue has not been finalized, but all AMBIS members who can should plan ahead to participate in this important once-a-year event. The program will include informational updates on various aspects of AMBIS activity of interest to members.

Principal speaker for the event is to be writer Joe O'Connell, whose recent book, *Evacuation Plans*, is based on interviews and observations of time spent at Hospice Austin's Christopher House.

Of special interest at the Annual Meeting will be a progress update on Green Burial options in the Austin-Central Texas area and related developments in personal control of end-of-life issues including home funerals led by family and friends.

**Ed Nichols, President, AMBIS Governing council**

*Advance Care Planning, from page 1*

the fragile condition of their body makes such resuscitation efforts less desirable than death because of the additional pain the efforts might cause. These efforts can break bones and ribs and tear tissue in a feeble body. If the effort is successful, the remaining life is often limited and the person may well suffer more than before the cardiac failure that led to the resuscitation attempt. An OOH-DNR order is issued by a medical doctor after consultation with the patient or the patient's medical agent.

The Statutory Durable Power of Attorney (SDPOA) is used to name a financial agent, someone who can make financial decisions if a person becomes unable to do so. It must be notarized. Much like the Medical Power of Attorney, the SDPOA can be used if you cannot make financial decisions or sign documents temporarily (if under sedation or traveling away from home, for example) or if you become mentally incapacitated to the extent that you cannot manage your financial affairs. The statutory form allows a choice of making the POA effective immediately or only if you become mentally incapacitated as determined by a medical doctor. I have found that it is more useful to have the form take effect upon execution, but this is an individual decision to be made by each person depending on his or her circumstances.

The MPOA and the SDPOA, taken together, almost always succeed in avoiding the expense and complications of a guardianship, should one become necessary in the future. For this reason, I recommend them to all my clients as a way to avoid the need for a guardianship.

The Appointment of Agent to Control Disposition of Remains allows you to name someone who will have legal authority to make final disposition decisions for your body after death. This form is used in many cases to eliminate confusion or disagreements among relatives about disposition choices. This form, like the SDPOA, must be notarized.

The Body Disposition Authorization Affidavit allows you to choose the exact manner of body disposition, and also must be notarized. Using this form eliminates any doubt about your wishes, and under Texas law it must be honored by funeral officials.

If you are not completely satisfied by the options provided by the Directive to Physicians or the Medical Power of Attorney, supplemental instructions, including a chart of medical conditions and treatments, may be appended to both instruments to make sure that your wishes are clear. And you can write a personal statement that explains your views and thoughts on the subject of death, dying, suffering, dignity, etc. and attach it to either directive.

The Medical Agent's job is to assure that your wishes are honored. Be sure to select someone as your Medical Agent who you believe can and will carry out your wishes, and select an alternate who will be equally diligent. Ω

## **Advance Care Planning Workshop**

You are invited to attend the Fall 2008  
AMBIS Advance Care Planning Workshop

Saturday, November 22, 2008  
10 am to 12:30 pm

AGE Building Dining Room  
3710 Cedar Street, Austin, Texas

### **Reservations Required**

Tel. 512-480-055

email: [mail@ambis.info](mailto:mail@ambis.info)

(Note: If you have advance planning forms, please bring them with you to the workshop. Sets of forms will be available for a nominal charge to cover copy costs.)

## **New members report**

For the first eight months of this year, AMBIS has grown by 112 new member families. Some new members are transfers from other affiliates of Funeral Consumers Alliance, but most are from referrals. By far the greatest sources of new referrals are from AMBIS members and from hospice programs operating in the Austin area. Other sources of new members are

AGE lunch group	AARP
Clark Howard Show	Collier Caskets
DADS Fair	1st UU Church
Family Eldercare	Gracy Woods staff
Newsletter	LAMP presentation
Seton Chaplain	United Way
Alzheimer's Support Group	
Fr. Amy-Donohue-Adams	
Retired State Employees Assn.	
St. Matt's Episcopal presentation	
AMBIS web page	

Don't forget to tell others about AMBIS. Everyone needs the information AMBIS provides. Ω

## Please Help Us Keep Our Mailing List Current

To help us keep our mailing costs down, be sure to let AMBIS know if your address changes. If you move out of the area, we can help you transfer your membership. Send changes by email, call the AMBIS office at 512-480-0555, or send this form with the old address to AMBIS

My new or corrected address is:

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Name

---

City, State, Zip

---

Phone

---

Email address

**Austin Memorial & Burial  
Information Society  
A Funeral Consumers Alliance  
P. O. Box 4382  
Austin, Texas 78765**

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Fall 2008



To mail an address correction, please clip and mail to AMBIS at P.O.Box 4382, Austin, TX 78765, or take to AMBIS office in the Austin Groups for the Elderly Bldg. at 3710 Cedar St. (at 38th Street), Room 112. Email an address change to <mail@ambis.info>.

### AMBIS CONTRACTED FUNERAL HOMES

The following funeral homes offer to AMBIS members a 15% discount off the costs shown on their General Price Lists:

- King-Tears Funeral Home  
1300 E. 12th Street (512-476-9128)
- Harrell Funeral Home  
4435 Frontier Trail (512-443-1366)
- Wilke-Clay-Fish Funeral Home  
2620 S. Congress (512-442-1446)
- Weed-Corley-Fish Funeral Home  
3125 N. Lamar (512-452-8811)

When contacting one of these funeral homes, please provide proof of your AMBIS membership by showing a copy of this newsletter addressed to you or your new membership letter. Membership can be confirmed also by calling the AMBIS office at 512-480-0555.

[www.ambis.info](http://www.ambis.info)

### CREATIVE CHOICES

CREATIVE CHOICES is published quarterly by the Austin Memorial and Burial Information Society, a nonprofit, nonsectarian consumer and educational organization formed in 1964 to protect a consumer's right to choose a meaningful, dignified, and affordable funeral.

The ideas expressed in CREATIVE CHOICES are those of the authors and editor and not necessarily those of AMBIS. Address changes, editorial items, letters, and inquiries about the benefits of membership should be sent to:

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Telephone inquiries may be made to 512/480-0555  
E-mail may be sent to mail@ambis.info

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