

Advance Directives as Acts of Communication - a randomized controlled trial

Ditto P, Danks J, Smucker W, et al. Arch Intern Med Vol161, Feb12,2001.

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Abstract:

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Comments:

Strengths/uniqueness: No other study has attempted to demonstrate the effects of instructional advance directives(AD) versus patient/surrogate decision maker on the accuracy of the surrogate's substitution judgement.

This is a well-designed RCT.

Weaknesses: Only two formatted AD's were used - it is feasible that other AD's could be more effective. Possible bias exists in the health status and level of education of the study group, yet the fact that two detailed, empirically derived, but quite different, instructional AD's proved equally ineffective, supports the generalizability of the findings.

Relevance to Palliative Care: Our patients are not in a hypothetical situation and are faced with making decisions/directives for their limited future. This article suggests that AD's do not seem to improve the accuracy of surrogate decision making. We need to explore other means of facilitating the surrogate decision process.