

Criteria of Advanced Dementia to Consider Natural Dying

*These criteria are intended for future decision-makers to use as a **guide** to determine **WHEN** the time has come to Permit Natural Dying. The described items must be irreversible and progressive. Some items refer to patient's thinking, memory, feelings or behavior; others are preferences or value statements. To satisfy the criteria for Natural Dying, patients need not, and rarely will, meet all items. Any symptom or behavior may qualify an item. Patients can revoke the use of these criteria or modify any of them—as long as they possess the ability to make medical decisions.*

1. About myself: I seem not to be self-aware. I cannot recall the fundamental values of my life. I cannot recall or appreciate the significance of important events in my life or of emotionally significant relationships. I have no concept of my future. I am not able to plan ahead;
2. Expressing my wishes and promoting my pleasure and decreasing my pain: I cannot communicate any wishes by using words or gestures. I cannot make sounds or movements to indicate “Yes” or “No” in a consistent way. This incapacity puts me at risk to suffer from a variety of symptoms that others may not recognize and thus not treat, including physical pain and other kinds of suffering;
3. Relating to others: I cannot recognize family members or cherished friends. I seem puzzled or I am wrong in identifying them. I utter no words or sounds, or I make no gestures, as they enter or leave my presence. I am unable to pray to, or relate to a Supreme Being (if I believe in one);
4. Dependency and Dignity: I have become totally dependent on others for my basic care; for example, I cannot bathe or dress myself, and/or I am incontinent of urine and/or feces. My social behavior no longer reflects my life-long values, so I have lost my dignity as I previously defined it;
5. My mood, even with treatment: I rarely express joy or pleasure. I am almost always withdrawn, apathetic, despondent or non-responsive. I am often agitated or seem plagued with fear or horror;
6. Burdens versus effectiveness: Maintaining my existence requires almost constant care or intensive medical treatment, and will not be effective to provide improvement or to benefit to my quality of life so that I can live outside an institution or without such treatment or care;
7. Burdens versus benefits: I do not want to prolong the dying of my biologic body if I cannot appreciate any benefit while the burdens to my loved ones require great sacrifices, which may include: depleting my and/or their finances, diverting their attention from other important activities and responsibilities, and causing them to suffer from physical exhaustion or mental depression;
8. Regarding food and fluid: I do not want medically-administered nutrition and hydration, even if there is a risk of contracting pneumonia by aspirating into my lungs what others put into my mouth. After I have lost the *mental ability* to know how to eat and to drink, I do not want manual assistance **IF** I seem to have lost enjoyment from tasting and chewing so that it has become necessary to place pureed food at the back of my tongue to initiate a swallowing reflex, OR my actions indicate I am reluctant to eat, OR my trusted physician (AND my proxy, if authorized) believes that I meet a sufficient number of the other seven **Criteria of Advanced Dementia to Consider Natural Dying**.