

The Barriers to Completing an Advance Directive: The Perspectives of Healthcare Professionals

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ISBN

978-1-392-20035-3

Abstract

This dissertation examines the barriers to completing an advance directive from the perspective of healthcare professionals who use advance directives routinely. A systematic literature review and key informant interviews with professionals who routinely handle end-of-life issues during their normal working routines were completed as part of this research.

The research identified six themes related to barriers to completing an advance directive: 1) provider time constraints; 2) education: patients, loved ones, and healthcare professionals; 3) a lack of comfort discussing end of life; 4) culture; 5) advance care planning involvement; and 6) specialization by non-physicians. With respect to the current environment for reimbursement, Medicare and some insurance plans currently provide professional reimbursement for counseling patients on end-of-life decisions and assistance completing an advance directive. Key informants differ in their opinions as to whether or not the current reimbursement environment will influence healthcare professionals to increase their efforts to assist patients in the completion of advance directive documents.

The plan for change to increase the usage of advance directives is described in Chapter Six. As a member of the UNC Healthcare Advance Care Planning Task Force, I am part of a guiding coalition that will shape the efforts of the UNC Healthcare system with regard to Advance Care Planning. The plan for change will include education of both healthcare professionals and patients as well as supporting the development of a cadre of non-physician professionals to lead advance care planning discussions with adults of all ages in several different healthcare settings. Physician champions will be recruited within the UNC Healthcare system to be trained to provide education to physicians and non-physician healthcare professionals. Educational materials will also be developed and partnerships with other organizations will be explored. The UNC Healthcare Advance Care Planning Task Force will play an important role in executing several components of the plan for change.

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University location

United States -- North Carolina

Degree

Dr.P.H.

Source type

Dissertations & Theses

Language

English

Document type

Dissertation/Thesis

Dissertation/thesis number

13425383

ProQuest document ID

2235950083

Document URL

<http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/2235950083?accountid=14244>