

Preparing for Your Own Death: Personal Checklist

There are a lot of factors to take into consideration when you make the decision to begin the process outlined in the California End of Life Option Act. Beyond the decision itself, there are many personal matters to think about and there may be some specific tasks you wish to accomplish. It can be time consuming and takes some energy ahead of time, but may be helpful to you and your family to think through these issues. There can be positive experiences in actively addressing these issues and some relief in knowing that you have taken care of some unfinished business. Many have found these to be areas to consider, in addition to our “Preparing for End of Life” checklists you’ll also find in the Patient Packet.

Whether or not you receive or use the aid-in-dying drug, these steps can be helpful in preparing. We want to note that we also recognize that at the time you receive this, you may also be quite ill. This list is not a demand or meant to add additional pressure on you. If you have a small amount of energy and time, then this list can be used as an opportunity to decide what is most important for you and your family.

Personal Communications With Your Family and Friends About Healthcare

- Have I **discussed my condition** with my family/friends in complete honesty?
- Have I told my loved ones EXACTLY what **medical interventions** that I want and do not want? Do they know at what stage of illness I would choose to forgo certain therapies or artificial life support? Share and discuss your advance directive, POLST and other important paperwork indicating your wishes with them.
- My family needs to know whom I have put in charge of my medical decisions when I can no longer make them. My **healthcare proxy or surrogate medical decision-maker** needs to understand and agree to carry out my wishes and desires regarding my end-of-life care.
- Do I need a **private discussion** with anyone, if it would help them to accept my decision?

Personal Considerations

- What are my beliefs about death? Do I need to make peace with myself or with any spiritual figures of my faith? At UCLA, talk to your clinical consultant if this is something that is important to you. He or she can direct you to spiritual resources.
- Do I need psychological, emotional, spiritual care, counseling or support? At UCLA, your clinical consultant can help with appropriate referrals.
- Do I have anything amiss with my family/friends to fix? Can I fix them now?
- Do I have letters to write? Calls to make?

- Are there people that you want to make peace with before you die? It can be helpful to make a list of people that you want to have a final communication with either to express love and gratitude, or to address old grudges, enemies, etc. Attempt to settle those affairs. You may use this list as a guide:

"I'm sorry."

"Thank you."

"Goodbye."

"I forgive you."

"I love you."

- Have I created my "**bucket list**"? What am I able to accomplish with the time I have left? This may help inform your choices around when to take the aid-in-dying drug and your goals for medical care. We also know that you may not have the opportunity to do all of this; you may want to think about what is possible for you, setting smaller goals, while still listing other goals that may or may not be obtainable. Use this list to help create your "goals of medical care."
- To whom do I give my **personal belongings**? If you are married, most likely all of your belongings will **transfer to your spouse or family**. If you are single, then you must specify what you want done with these items. There may be special items that you want to designate for special people or give in advance.
- Who gets my special items, such as photos, mementos, etc.?
- Have I labeled (identified) the people in my photos? To whom do my photos (pictures, negatives, discs, etc.) go? This should not be a pressure to do more than you are capable of doing. If you go through pictures, you may want to do this with a friend or family member as you may have special photos you wish to be shared at your funeral or memorial if appropriate in your culture.
- If I am single and have children who are minors, have I set up a **guardian for my children** for the immediate time after my death? Short-term money for them?
- Have I set up the paperwork for where my children will go permanently?
- What should I **sell before my death**? House? Car? Furniture? Land?
- Have I made arrangements for the care of my **pets**?
- What **unfinished projects** around the house, at work, or in the community would I like to complete? Again, this should not be a pressure about what you can and cannot do.
- If I have young children, **have I left letters** or **videos** to them? Please see the enclosed article on written legacies.
- Are all my digital photos/videos in one place? What about my computer(s)? Have I left passwords my family will need after I die?

Personal Reflection and Communication About the Dying Process

In addition to logistical considerations regarding the aid-in-dying drug, there remain personal considerations about your desires that require reflection and communication to your family and loved ones throughout this process. Here is a checklist of things to consider and guide you through a deeper reflection and conversation:

- Whom would you want to be present?
- Would you want to be held, caressed or touched?
- What kind of atmosphere would you want?
- Are there photos, special objects or animal companions you would want nearby? Particular flowers, candles, or scents?
- Would you prefer silence, or a particular piece of music played?
- Would you want a particular poem or prayer read?
- Would you want loved ones to reminisce and share stories as if it were a party, or just carry on as if it were an ordinary day?

There are no right answers to any of these questions – except what you would want.

Funeral/Memorial/Wake/Celebration of Life - Planning and Logistics

Each person and family is different in how they treat death and if, how and where they memorialize someone who has died. It is sometimes determined by religious practices, spiritual beliefs or cultural norms. It may also be governed solely by personal preferences and choice, having no ties to other cultural or religious backgrounds. When there is no religious or cultural framework, families especially may want to know preferences. This section provides opportunities to think about what you may or may not want to help guide your friends and family.

- Where do I want my body to be taken? Which funeral home/mortuary? Do you have a preference?
- How do you want your body handled after your death? Do I want to be embalmed? Buried? Cremated? Do I want a green burial (an environmentally-friendly natural burial)? Would my family want this also?
- What are my burial/casket preferences?
- Whom do I want notified of my death?
- Do I want to write my own obituary?

- Do I have burial plot? If cremated, where should my ashes be scattered or interred?
- Do I want/need a headstone/grave marker? Have I written out what I want inscribed on it? Design?
- Do I want a ceremony of some kind, such as a funeral/wake/memorial service or celebration of life?
- Do I have special needs for my ceremony? Military? Religious? At home?
- Who will deliver the eulogy or are there several people that you would like to speak about you and your life? Ask him or her in advance.
- Should I pre-pay funeral/burial/cremation expenses? It can often be less expensive when done in advance. If this is hard for you, do you want to designate someone to make these arrangements in advance? If so, talk to them.
- Do I want to identify a charity "in lieu of flowers"? This is often very helpful to programs that are supported by philanthropic funds and can be helpful to others or causes you believe in.
- Who needs to be made aware of my death? Make a contact list for your funeral or memorial notices.

This document was abstracted and adapted from the "Preparing for Your Own Death" checklist created by OKtodie.com, which offers additional resources related to end of life. Permission for use was granted on June 3, 2016.