

Advance directives in older people in India

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Introduction: End of life issues have long been debated in civilized society and have intrigued providers, ethicists, legislators and patients. Advance directives have been applied in several countries around the world but their use in India has not yet been considered seriously. In this article we tried to review the use of ADs in the literature and assess its applicability to the Indian population.

Methods: We systematically reviewed published literature on the subject of advance directives with a focus on their applicability in the Indian population. We searched the Pubmed using key-words advance directives, living wills filtering articles where the keywords appeared in the title of the article in December 2013. Subsequently the titles and abstracts were screened for relevance by independent authors approaching the subject under pre-decided sub-heads such as a) need and necessity; b) international policy; c) attitudes and practices; d) applicability in India; e) components of a good/legally binding AD; and f) administration. Any conflict between the two reviewers was resolved by discussion and mutual agreement.

Observations: Using the keywords we were able to identify 1644 articles without using any filters. Of these 407 articles included the keywords in their title. 46 articles of relevance were identified for detailed review after screening of titles and abstracts.

Results: Advance Directives are still in early stage in India and health care workers need to be sensitized to their use as much as patients themselves. Application of ADs in India is fraught with several problems and difficulties. Scarcity of resources and risk of misuse are potential hitches in their use. Advance directives would be an important tool in the Indian cultural settings in ensuring patient autonomy and improving quality of life and life satisfaction.