

All Registries Are Not Created Equal:

How to Choose the Advance Directive Registry that's Best for You and Your Clients

In the last article, we discussed the benefits of storing your client's healthcare directives (living will, healthcare power of attorney, HIPAA release) with an advance directive registry. Doing so ensures the safety and consistent accessibility of clients' healthcare wishes, thus providing convenience and peace of mind in the face of a medical emergency. But all registries are not the same, and it's best to do your homework before committing to a service. You want a registry that balances reliability with flexibility. Here, we highlight features that characterize the best advance directives registries – and what to look for when evaluating your options.

The best advance directive retrieval systems operate around-the-clock and every day of the year, regardless of holidays, and can provide the client's documents immediately upon request. Clients experiencing medical emergencies at 2 a.m. or on a weekend will have the same level of access to their documents as they would with emergencies occurring during regular business hours. Most systems are fully automated; but look for one that also has a live person available for assistance at all times. In addition, the better systems work worldwide – providing consistent service regardless of geographic location.

Top-notch systems include the ability to fax documents directly to the hospital, rather than having web-only access. A study conducted by one registry found that hospital staff could not obtain directives via the Internet in about seventy percent of cases – because Internet access is not available at their workstation or because the hospital employee does not have Internet privileges.

Most registries provide clients with wallet cards, which medical staff uses to obtain the directives. Some registries also take the extra step of providing stickers for the driver's license to alert emergency personnel to look for the wallet card. Some registries store emergency contacts and health alerts – also displaying this information on the clients' wallet cards.

You also want a registry that is user-friendly. Ask yourself: Is the system easy to understand and use? To

what extent can friends and family access a client's stored information? Finally, does the service maintain communication with its clients to request information updates?

Some registries work primarily with legal and financial advisors. For example, DocuBank is the registry recommended by the National Network of Estate Planning Attorneys. Some registries target hospitals and health providers, and still others aim for the direct-to-consumer market. Registries working directly with financial professionals and lawyers often provide marketing benefits for advisors who enroll their clients. (We'll say more about that in the next issue.) Clients, in turn, are grateful to their advisors for the convenience, peace of mind, and protection that a registry ensures.

For more information about registries, feel free to visit DocuBank at www.docubank.com or Google "advance directive registries." For more examples of the unintended effects of the HIPAA law, see the recent front page article in the *New York Times*, from July 3, 2007.



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