

## States, caregivers, lawyers see huge jump in living will requests

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The Terri Schiavo case has drawn unprecedented attention to living wills across the country, with tens of thousands of requests for the documents in the last few weeks when usually there is just a trickle of interest.

E-mail is flooding state government agencies. Lawyers' offices are swamped with phone calls. Web sites have lit up with downloads or requests for living wills and advance directives.

"Sometimes it takes an event like this to show the absolutely catastrophic situation that can result of not doing something like this," said Susan Andres at the Alabama Bar Association. "Something could happen at any time and it's important to have that document. Terri Schiavo was only 26."

Living wills allow people to say how far they want medical care to go and place limits on that care, in case they become so ill that they are unable to communicate. Advance directives include wills and health care proxies, where someone chooses a person to make future health care decisions for them, if they are unable to.

Usually, the Maryland Web site that provides state forms for living will and advance directives gets 50 or fewer downloaded a week. In the last 10 days, that jumped to about 47,000, said Kevin Enright at the state attorney general's office.

The New York State Bar Association posted a link to let people get wills on March 24, six days after Schiavo's feeding tube was withdrawn and as the furor over her fate raged. More than 76,000 living will forms, 14,760 health care proxy forms and 6,930 living will pamphlets were downloaded.

Manufacturers of computer software to create living wills have seen sales surge in the past few days, too.

At the Florida-based Aging with Dignity, a national group that provides a standardized living will known as "Five Wishes" that meets legal requirements in 36 states, requests have skyrocketed, said president Paul Malley.

"A normal number of requests in a day would be about 50 to 100," Malley said. "In recent days we've had up to 6,000 in a single day. These requests are coming from all over the country and even internationally."

He has doubled his staff from eight to 16 to handle incoming phone lines and Internet requests.

And it is not just older people calling. Lawyers say they are now hearing from many callers in their 40s and 50s.

"The critical fact of the Schiavo case is that she failed to have living will. Had she put her wishes in writing, the long, drawn-out legal battle would not have become what it became," said **Howard Krooks** chair of the Elder Law section of the New York State Bar Association.

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