

*Once they tell you
you're in God's
hands, you know
you're done*

*Alan Marshall,
I Can Jump Puddles*

If you were very ill and unable to speak, how would doctors know what you wanted and didn't want?



Living will

Living wills are legally persuasive if they are validly executed and applicable in the circumstances that arise. The difficulty of prosecuting doctors who ignore them remains outstanding as the incapacitated patient is in no position to begin a lawsuit.

In a recent survey, only 49% of doctors were aware living wills could carry legal force.

Advance directives, or "living wills" attempt to permit individuals to have a voice in situations where they are otherwise unable to control what is done to them.

When they first appeared, they simply tried to prevent over-treatment at the end of life, and counter the over-zealousness of doctors who refused to recognise when "enough was enough".

Nowadays, although still serving this purpose and with the support of the law, they are increasingly being used to guide doctors in selecting treatments and non-treatments in accordance with the patient's values.