

## **A LETTER TO MY FAMILY ABOUT MY END-OF-LIFE WISHES**

### **SUMMARY OF LETTER**

I do not want my death to be protracted or lingering, especially if I am bed-bound and cognitively impaired. The quality of my life is more important to me than its length.

Highly intensive medical technology for older people is rarely helpful and often only causes suffering. I don't want to end up hooked to tubes and machines. I want to be home with my loved ones or in an inpatient hospice like Casey House if it is too challenging to take care of me at home.

As I enter the last phase of my life, the following are important to me: being able to talk with all of you, being mentally alert and competent, preserving my quality of life, having autonomy and independence, being comfortable and free of pain, leaving good memories for all of you, dying quickly to avoid wasteful and expensive care.

I love so much about my life—being active, spending time with grandkids, writing, giving talks, and volunteering—that if none of these activities were possible for me to enjoy anymore, I would want to go out peacefully without a lot of heroics. I want my doctor to refer me to hospice as soon as I am eligible.

If I'm severely compromised (for example, by dementia or other illness) and unlikely to regain my ability to recognize loved ones, I'd consider my life over and want you to carry out my wishes for a peaceful death. Please do not work to prolong my life.

I believe if I have an irreversible illness or intractable pain, I have the right to end my life in any way I choose—a right to death with dignity.

I support terminal sedation, medical-aid-in-dying (MAID), and voluntarily stopping eating and drinking (VSED). I want access to MAID medications (if legal) so I have the option of taking a lethal dose of medicine. I do not want my life prolonged artificially after it has ceased to be the life I want.

## EXCERPTS FROM HIS LONGER LETTER

One of my life goals is to usher all of you gently through the process of my death so that, in retrospect, it is a positive, memorable, and loving experience for you.

I don't want you to suffer by watching me suffer. I do not want to be seen and remembered in a sad, pitiful state. I want to die *before* becoming a stranger to you through the cruel ravages of old age, particularly if I become demented.

I want my death to be peaceful and gentle, but I also want my exit from this world to be a meaningful, memorable, and even sacred time for all of you. So many survivors are traumatized by what they witness as their loved one dies in an ICU, with doctors frantically attempting to keep the dying patient alive for another few hours or days. I don't want you to be traumatized by my death.

As I enter the last phase of my life, the following are important to me: being able to talk with all of you, being mentally alert and competent, preserving my quality of life, having autonomy and independence, being comfortable and free of pain, leaving good memories for all

My life is full of loving, thinking, feeling, writing, talking, giving, teaching, volunteering, and laughing. If I cannot do those things and will never be able to do them, my life is over, and it's time for comfort care only.

If my mental function is seriously compromised with little chance for full recovery, please seek opportunities to encourage death's approach. Suppose, for example, I have pneumonia or another infection. Let my body go. Do not fight an infection with antibiotics if what remains after the drugs work is not worth fighting for. Are my kidneys faltering? Let them. Is my heart failing or my blood pressure falling? Do nothing. Am I refusing water and food? Good! Let it be.

Please look for what one expert in end-of-life issues, Dr. Joanne Lynn, calls "creative collaboration with the forces of nature." In other words, please take advantage of natural illnesses as they arise. Welcome my health failings as benefactors that have arrived to hasten my death. They should not be regarded as diseases to be attacked and combated with medical marvels.