

Good afternoon everyone. I would like to thank Senator Sheldon Whitehouse for holding today's hearing. Senator Whitehouse is tackling a very sensitive but important issue this afternoon and we thank him for that.

We are here to discuss care for individuals with advanced illnesses. With the rapidly growing number of older Americans who are living longer than ever, we are going to face a continuing rise in the number of people suffering from chronic diseases – especially in their later years. And these people deserve to have their wishes carried out when it comes to their health care at the end of life.

But as a recent article in the Wall Street Journal made clear, it is important for people to understand that some living wills are better than others, and that even if you have one, it's possible that your wishes may not be followed. Many living wills are simply too vague or fail to cover unanticipated situations. If people are considering a living will, they need to work out the details with the help of a doctor and a loved one.

In my state of Wisconsin, we have excellent models of clear advanced directives and health systems that adhere to patients' wishes. One such model is Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center in La Crosse. Their written testimony submitted for the record today states, 96 percent of all adult residents of La Crosse County who died had some type of advanced care plan, and treatments were consistent with the patient's wishes over 99 percent of the time. Models such as this must be replicated throughout the country. It is vital for patients, their families, and our overall health care system.

Today, our witnesses will highlight some of the best practices and discuss ways to improve our health care system so that it can better serve people with advanced illnesses. As I have already stated, an important part of this care is making sure that treatment decisions align with patients' preferences and goals.

Nothing should get in the way of providing comfort to people suffering from advanced illnesses. Our hope is that today we will discover some ways to promote better patient care.

Once again, I'd like to thank Senator Whitehouse for his leadership on this issue.