

By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican

Last week, the 24-hour news (?) channels all got themselves in a tizzy about a Bakersfield, Calif., independent care facility that would not administer CPR on an 87-year-old woman who had collapsed.

The 911 dispatcher pleaded with an employee at the facility, asking if there was anyone there to help the lady by administering CPR before the ambulance arrived. Bluntly, the employee told the dispatcher it was against the facility's policy to administer CPR.

As it turned out, the family of the woman who died backed the independent care facility, noting it was her wish to die naturally and without any life-prolonging efforts. They said she was fully aware the facility did not offer trained medical staff.

This incident reinforces the need to plan ahead for end-of-life care situations.

Personally, my wife Lori and I have both executed a health care directive and durable power of attorney for health care should we become incapacitated and unable to make our own health care decisions.

Our directives state that we want to enjoy life as long as possible. But should the situation arise that medical treatment would postpone death from a terminal condition or irreversible coma, we don't want those measures taken.

If those are your wishes as well, you need to make sure you have the directive and power of attorney in place now.

Last summer, when my mom decided after about a week in the hospital that she wasn't going to recover, she told us kids that she'd had enough and was ready to go.

That was her decision and we were fine with it. But without a health care directive and power of attorney already in place, mom's consent and our consent wouldn't have been enough to allow the hospital to stop life-giving measures.

Only after the hospital received a faxed copy of her directive would they remove the oxygen, IVs, and other measures as we had requested. Instead of life-saving efforts, they refocused their efforts to keep mom comfortable in her final hours.

I'm grateful that mom and dad had the foresight to institute their own end-of-life wishes instead of being forced to die on someone else's terms.

Lori and I have had a discussion with our family about our end-of-life wishes. While it's not a rosy topic to discuss, it's a conversation all families should have.

And if you want to decide on what terms you will leave this world in a terminal or comatose condition, you need to get consultation today if you don't already have your own directives in place.