

**Just What the (Juris) Doctor Ordered...
Essential Planning Documents in a Pandemic**

By: Bill Gustoff, JD, President, Legal Division
Thompson & Associates
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The COVID-19 pandemic and how the world has responded to it has implications well beyond epidemiology. Governments struggle with how to respond, financial markets are on a rollercoaster, and we have new vocabulary phrases like “community spread” and “social distancing.”

The result is anxiety, which causes panic and indecision. In the chaos around us, don’t overlook this important question: “What are the critical documents to have in place if I succumb to a major illness?” My answer may surprise you. It is not that you need a Last Will and Testament.

If you become disabled due to an accident or illness, someone should have the authority to handle financial matters and make personal and healthcare decisions for you. Petitioning a court for guardianship or conservatorship is expensive, time consuming, and degrading. Spare your loved ones having to trek into a lawyer’s office and courthouse just to have simple decision-making authority.

My “prescription” is to execute basic powers of attorney or advance directives. These inexpensive documents allow you to name someone to make financial decisions and healthcare decisions for you in the event of disability. You may also give them some “advance directives” on certain decisions to be made (e.g. a “living will” to stop or avoid life-sustaining treatment).

I do not recommend a “home remedy” of self-drafted documents. These documents may look simple, but they are traps for the unwary! These are usually not expensive to have prepared, and the time the document is most needed (i.e., you are disabled) is a very bad time to discover it was not prepared or executed properly. Seek competent counsel on this important matter.

If you do not know where to start, or if you would like some basic questions answered before you seek professional assistance, we can help with that. Thompson & Associates offers a confidential, values-based estate planning service to nonprofit friends and supporters without charge. If you want to schedule a time to talk, please contact