

HEALTH DECISIONS

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A PUBLICATION OF THE VERMONT ETHICS NETWORK

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VDH Grant Supports Outreach on Advance Directive Registry

The Vermont Ethics Network received a grant from the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) to conduct community sessions to promote the Vermont Advance Directive Registry (VADR) during the current Fiscal Year that started last July. Already sessions have been held at more than a dozen public libraries as well as in public housing sites and at Senior Centers across the state. More sessions are planned during the winter months (see VENotes at the end of this newsletter). Efforts are beginning to pay off. Although the Registry has only been available for a little more than 10 months, over 1200 Vermonters have deposited copies of their Advance Directives in this electronic database, leading Bill Apao of VDH to predict that over 1500 Vermonters will have registered by the first anniversary of this new free service.

Among the interesting statistics that the Health Department have compiled about registrants is the fact that 60 percent of the current registrants are 60 or older. Even more encouraging, according to VEN Executive Director John Campbell, is the flip side of that coin: 40 percent are younger than 60. (See chart on page 2.)

Traditionally, seniors have been more apt to complete Advance Directives. When asking for a show of hands at senior centers of people who have completed Advance Directives (or “Living Wills” as they are commonly referred to by the general public), Campbell said he often gets hands up that amount to well over half the audience. Yet in venues such as an undergraduate sociology class at UVM where he made a presentation earlier this month, only 4 of the 25 students raised their hands. His approach, whether speaking to a younger audience or a group of seniors is to ask that those present return to their families and communities as “ambassadors” to promote awareness of Advance Directives and the new Vermont Advance Directive Registry.

A portion of the Health Department grant allowed VEN to design and publish a new brochure about the Vermont Advance Directive Registry. This small publication is a companion to the commonly used VEN booklet *Taking Steps*. Of the first printing of 10,000, nearly three-quarters of the brochure have already been distributed to hospitals, lawyers’ offices, Area Agencies on Aging, and individuals who call with inquiries about the Registry. A one-page Registration Agreement form is part of the brochure. This needs to be filled out, signed, and sent with the most up-to-date completed Advance Directive to the Vermont Advance Directive Registry.

Some people have expressed surprise that the VADR address is Westfield,

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Advance Directive Workshop at McClure Library, Pittsford, Vermont. Photo by George Bellerose

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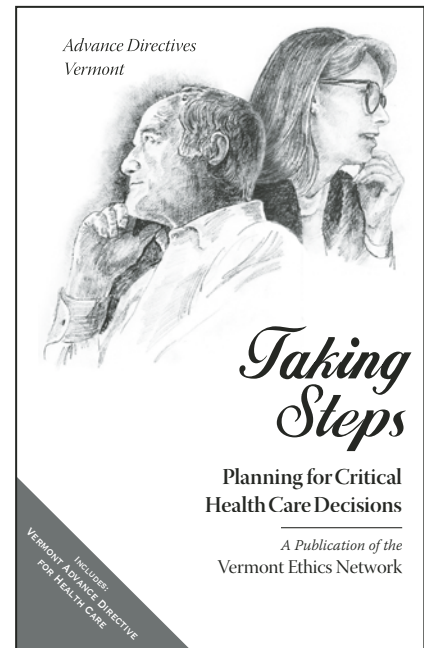
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VEN prepares for 11th printing of *Taking Steps* in January, 2008

A new edition of *Taking Steps: Planning for Critical Health Care Decisions* will be available in about a month. In addition to updated references to the Vermont Advance Directive Registry, people will notice some changes in the Advance Directive form itself, specifically to make clearer the options around “trial of treatment” and feeding tubes. This has been a concern for a number of months, especially with the passage of a new Advance Directive law in New Hampshire that restricts an agent’s participation in feeding tube decisions if this has not been addressed by the principal in his or her Advance Directive. Reformatted items in the new VEN AD form will add more clarity to the document as well. Members of the Rural Ethics Network have weighed in with suggestions and major editorial and drafting assistance has been volunteered by Dr. Bob Macauley, Director of Clinical Ethics at FAHC and Rev. Lynn Burgess, Chaplain at the Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital

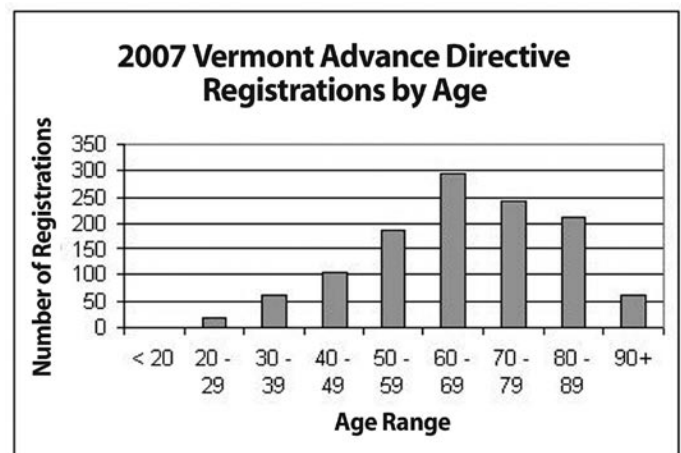
in St. Johnsbury. Their assistance in developing the revised form is very much appreciated! People who still have copies of the current edition and form may continue to use these as well.



Community Outreach *Continued from page 1*

N.J. The contractor for this unique and dedicated service, the *U.S. Living Will Registry™* is based in New Jersey. Within a week to ten days, they send back a confirmation packet of information to registrants that includes a wallet card, stickers for drivers’ licences, and forms to indicate any future changes in the registrant’s Advance Directive form. These might include things as simple as changes of address for the designated agent or alternate agents. Every year the Vermont Advance Directive Registry will contact registrants as a

reminder to notify them of any changes in their Advance Directive. For more information go to www.healthvermont.gov/vadr.



Green Mountain Care Provides Comprehensive, Quality Health Coverage

With the state of Vermont's recently launched Green Mountain Care, a comprehensive family of low-cost and free health coverage programs, uninsured Vermonters have more health coverage options than ever before. Green Mountain Care programs include Catamount Health, the newest program which opened for enrollment on October 1, 2007, as well as Dr. Dynasaur, Vermont Health Access Plan (VHAP), Medicaid and Prescription Assistance programs.

"Green Mountain Care represents the most comprehensive package of health coverage options the state has ever seen," said Governor Jim Douglas. "While we are very proud that more than 90 percent of Vermonters have health coverage, it is a top priority to offer everyone in our state access to affordable insurance."

Green Mountain Care programs provide coverage for health care services including doctor visits, hospital visits, and emergency care, as well as check ups, prescription medicines, chronic disease care, immunizations, mental health care and more.

"From a serious accident to an unexpected illness to a minor injury,

you just can't predict what might be around the corner," said John Campbell, Executive Director of the Vermont Ethics Network. "Green Mountain Care is there to make sure uninsured Vermonters have access to health care in case of accidents or illnesses, big or small." Richard Brandenburg, former Chair of the VEN board added: "This innovative and forward looking development in health care reform addresses many of the most important concerns and suggestions raised in VEN's Study Circles on Access to Health Care that were held throughout the State in 2001-2002."

When you are uninsured, you can't always afford to go to the doctor when you need to. And sometimes, minor health issues can turn into major problems. Green Mountain Care provides quality health coverage to make sure that uninsured Vermonters get the care they need when they need it.

If you or someone you know is uninsured, go to www.GreenMountainCare.org or call 1-800-250-8427 to learn more.

- Kevin Veller, VEN Board Member and Director of Outreach and Enrollment for Health Care Reform

Green Mountain Care programs include:

- * **New! Catamount Health** – for adults who have been uninsured for 12 months or more (certain exceptions apply); Catamount Health also offers help with paying premiums depending on income; family plans are also available through Catamount Health.
- * **Dr. Dynasaur** – Low-cost or free health coverage program for children, teenagers under age 18 and pregnant women;
- * **Vermont Health Access Plan (VHAP)** – Health coverage program for low-income uninsured adults age 18 and older who have been uninsured for 12 months or more (several exceptions apply); VHAP also offers assistance with paying employer's premiums depending on income.
- * **Medicaid** – Low-cost or free health coverage program for low-income children, young adults under age 21, parents, pregnant women, caretaker relatives, people who are blind or have disabilities and people over age 65; eligibility is based on income and resources.
- * **Prescription Assistance** – Programs help pay for prescription medicines and include VPharm, VHAP-Pharmacy, VScript and Healthy Vermonters; eligibility is based on income, disability status and age.



BOOK REVIEW: *Stem Cell Now*

by Christopher Thomas Scott, Pi Press, New York: 2006

Rarely does a book come along that combines science and ethics in an exciting and readable format. Just such a book is *Stem Cell Now* by Christopher Scott, Executive Director of the Stanford University Center for Biomedical Ethics Program in Stem Cells and Society. Describing the biology of hESC (human Embryonic Stem Cells) and the issues around therapeutic cloning and the emergence of new possibilities using adult stem cells and cord cells (from the placenta), Scott moves from the biology to a balanced discussion and recent history of stem cell debates and bills since President Bush's initial order of August 9, 2001. Concluding the book, Scott predicts that the US will be left behind by other countries that have embraced stem cell research and developed effective guidelines to control the parameters, countries such as Britain, Scotland, Sweden, Singapore and Australia, among others. Those who want to understand the issues that continue to swirl around stem cells and the promise and potential of treatment breakthroughs in the coming years for conditions as diverse as juvenile diabetes, spinal chord injury, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's Disease, among others, would do well to read this little book (now out in paperback at \$15).

MOVIE REVIEW: *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*

Due to be released this month is the heartwrenching tale of Jean Dominique Bauby, the young (40ish) and high-living former editor of *Elle Magazine* who suffered a brain stem stroke in the mid-1990s that left him totally paralysed and unable to communicate except by blinking his left eye. Based on a paperback international bestseller of the same title (1997), the movie follows him from before and after and documents his remarkable ability to share his wit, sadness and wisdom from the other side of "locked-in" syndrome. Anyone who wants to plumb the reaches of consciousness and communication from the perspective of the patient could find no better experience than either the book or the movie. The *New York Times* and the *New Yorker* have both given this movie rave reviews. ... and while we're at it, another movie you might want to catch for some of the darker side of family caregiving and conflicts is *The Savages* where the curmudgeon elderly father crashes into dementia and then temporarily recovers to, among other things, consider the wisdom or opportunity of doing a "living will" with a momentarily lucid but very cynical retort. (This from a review snippet heard on NPR last month!)

Upcoming Workshops and Events

December 11 / Bennington / 2:30 PM

Advance Directive workshop at the Walloomsac Apartments just off Pleasant St.

January 15 / Burlington Two BHA building presentations for tenants and the community at Champlain Towers (12:30 PM) and South Square (2:30 PM). For more information contact Claire at 264-0999.

January 15 / Morrisville / 6:30 PM

Advance Directive Workshop at the Morrisville Public Library

January 16 / Brattleboro Public Library /

7 PM Advance Directive workshop—John Campbell will be joined by Dr. Ray Walker and Dr. Maggie Newton for this workshop presentation.

February 19 / First Congregational Church / Burlington, 12:30 PM

Advance Directive workshop.

March 12 / South Burlington Public Library /

12 NOON Advance Directive workshop.

Santa's Wish List for VEN: The computers we took with us in our move were then 4 years old and will soon qualify for Paleontology Studies (though they are still alive, thank goodness!) If anyone would like to give us a cash gift toward the purchase of new computer and printer equipment in '08, that would be much appreciated!
Have a Wonderful Christmas or Hanukah and Happy New Year!



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Please check the name and address on your label and if any changes should be made or you wish your name removed from the list, please notify us at the address above. Thank you.