

## Prelude: Choosing not to think about or plan for D&D

Evolution has equipped us with an instinct to live that fuels a most intense fear of D&D. In our culture, this fear is still managed mostly by avoidance, denial, faith or media white-wash. (Whom would you rather have lunch with: a minister, an undertaker, or a forensic pathologist?) Most of us would prefer to avoid anything that vividly confronts us with our own mortality, hopefully assuming that we will die painlessly in our sleep or that others will make us comfortable as we leave life. This approach avoids the anxiety and confusion about D&D that can accompany planning for these events.

I think that the decision to not think about D&D is OK. You may be a person for whom the cost in anxiety or depression is not worth the possible benefits of reducing your suffering or that of those you care about in the last stages of life. I would feel even more comfortable with your decision if you would consider revisiting the topic from time to time, just to see if your reaction is different, or if there have been developments in the area which might make a difference to you.

**So, the first question for you to consider is...**

I.1 Which of the following do you think are good reasons for you to avoid thinking about or planning for D&D:

**There is a good chance I will die in my sleep.**

**There will be medical or other means to prevent my suffering so there is nothing I need to do except cooperate.**

**There will be trustworthy professionals or capable relatives to make plans and decisions for me.**

**I am a person who reacts with strong, long-lasting anxiety or depression, and I would predict I would do so if I continue to explore this subject**

**I am too afraid, the subject is too distasteful, depressing or morbid.**

**Other reasons:**

If you do not want to pursue this subject any further, you can leave now or after any one of the next three questions...

I.2 If you do not plan for D&D, it is more likely that you will be kept alive as long as possible. Which of these beliefs that support this approach apply to you:

Since both I and my relatives and friends believe in the absolute sanctity of life and that any action or omission that shortens life is wrong or against the will of God, it will be a good thing if I am kept alive indefinitely, even if I am in a vegetative state or coma.

I believe that patients who appear to be unresponsive do know what is going on around them, so I will still be able to benefit from the attention of relatives and others who spend time with me.

Since there is continuing controversy over the definition of "brain dead", I want to wait until this is straightened out, so that I am not putting someone else in the position of having to take my life while I am still, by someone's definition, alive.

Even if I would want to leave life when I couldn't do anything or respond to anyone, the only ways that people can legally help me to do this are to turn off life support or to allow me to stop eating and drinking. In spite of evidence to the contrary, both these methods seem as though they would be very painful.

Other beliefs:

I.3 What are your reactions to the following scenarios which *might* occur if you didn't plan for the end of your life:

**Since I will not have communicated my wish to be allowed to leave life if I am unable to respond to anything or anyone (in a coma or vegetative state, as defined by brain activity), I will be kept alive indefinitely:**

**Since I will not have appointed someone to make medical decisions if I am unable to do so, I will be kept alive indefinitely, regardless of my level of functioning or brain activity:**

**Since I will be kept alive regardless of circumstances, my relatives and other people who care about me will suffer emotionally and perhaps financially:**

**Other possibilities:**

I.4 What are your thoughts about exploring D&D a little further by :

**... proceeding:**

**... talking to your doctor, lawyer and close relatives about end-of-life decisions:**

**... keeping your eyes and ears open for reports of changes in way the medical establishment can help ease suffering at the end of life:**

**... paying attention to indications that our culture is tolerating or encouraging people to take control of what happens to them at the end of life, rather than leaving it up to chance, the medical establishment, God, or the natural course of events:**

### **What Happens Next . . .**

For those of you who are young: As you get older, you will be reminded more frequently that you have a life expectancy. You will notice the increasing attention paid to end-of-life issues by the medical and ethical professions and by the media. As you proceed through the stages of your life, you will face many challenging problems. You will probably become stronger and better able to deal with the personal and social issues related to leaving life.

For all of us: Certainly, as time passes, D&D will become easier to deal with. Many people are working on ways to change the experience so that it is can be less painful physically and emotionally for you and for your survivors. Many people want more choices, and are working to deal with the problems that having more choices will bring.

For those of us who are going ahead: Let's face it. Most of us don't want to be here, beginning to consider something that is instinctually frightening yet inevitable. But maybe something worthwhile will result from trying to learn more about D&D and our reactions to it. Perhaps we will come out at the end of the journey a bit stronger. So, let's go ...