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Precedent autonomy and advance directives – problems and possibilities

Autonomy is a much discussed but also a widely acknowledged principle when it comes to competent patients. A much more complicated question is that concerning the non-standard case of patients who used to be, but are no longer, competent to make decisions for themselves. This presentation deals with some of the problems of applying the autonomy principle to such cases. I will discuss the problems associated with advance directives and "precedent autonomy"- the idea that the former competent self has the authority to make decisions regarding his or her future and non-competent self. I aim to argue that few of the alternatives of proxy- decision making suggested in the literature so far is consistent with the values we want to promote when we adhere to the autonomy of persons. Although some of the criticism directed towards the idea of precedent autonomy can be questioned - one being the metaphysical scepticism- other types of criticism need to be taken more seriously if we want to form a reasonable practise for advance directives. I will try to give my own solution to some of these problems and in particular analyse the problems of precedent autonomy in order to achieve advance directives with prescriptive force.