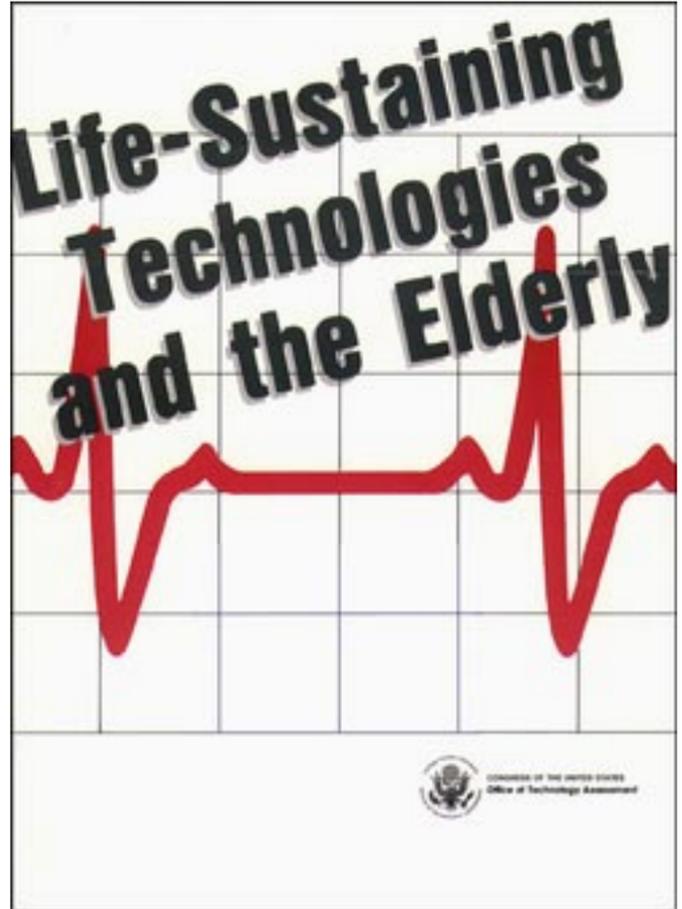


*Life-Sustaining Technologies and the Elderly*

July 1987

NTIS order #PB87-222527



Recommended Citation:

U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, *Life-Sustaining Technologies and the Elderly*, **OTA-BA-306** (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, July **1987**).

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 87-619835

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents  
U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402-9325  
(order form can be found in the back of this report)

# Foreword

In September 1984, OTA received requests from both the House and Senate Aging Committees to study the implications for their constituents of medical technologies that can sustain life in patients who are critically or terminally ill. Both Committee Chairmen, Senator John Heinz and Congressman Edward Roybal, expressed concern about elderly persons whose rights as patients and dignity as citizens are, or are feared to be, jeopardized—either by unwanted aggressive medical treatment or, conversely, by financial barriers to treatment.

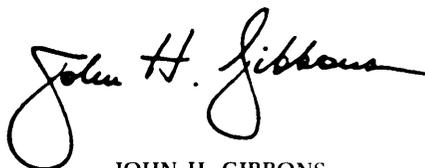
The Senate Special Committee on Aging cited “new questions about the quality of life” that accompanies increased survival made possible by “current and emerging methods of life support.” The Committee requested a “thorough review of the ethical dilemmas concerning life and death decisions that are faced by health care practitioners, elderly patients themselves, and concerned family members.” OTA was asked to explore the special problems related to treatment decisions for older patients who are cognitively impaired and, thus, unable to make their own decisions, and to compare alternate methods for specifying in advance one’s wishes regarding treatment. The Senate Committee also expressed interest in comparative reviews of the various institutional and noninstitutional settings in which life-sustaining technologies are used.

The House Select Committee on Aging identified as the key issues those related to “(financial access” to life-sustaining technologies and the “right to choose.” Of special interest were ways to ensure that elderly persons retain autonomy in treatment decisions, and the roles of families, providers, and government in supporting patient autonomy. Ethical issues related to the use of technologies that are currently available or anticipated were to be reviewed to advance understanding about care of the critically and terminally ill elderly. OTA was asked to assess the costs to patients, their families, and the public, and to lay the groundwork for policies about Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement of these technologies. Also of interest to the House Committee were the growing use of home care and issues related to quality of care, especially in the home.

In response, OTA has conducted a study of a wide range of topics, some of which have recently been receiving a great deal of scrutiny inside and outside the government. In order to derive information specific enough to guide possible congressional action and to be responsive to the requesting Committees, this examination of the issues is specifically tied to particular life-sustaining technologies and their use with patients who are *elderly*. At the same time, much of this information is applicable to life-sustaining technology in general and to citizens of all ages.

OTA has tried to provide a strong sense of the human dimension in this report. In addition to descriptions of what is theoretically possible and statistically documentable, much information is presented about the experience of individual patients and their families. The case examples, of which there are many, are true stories. While no case is “typical,” every one expresses the potential benefits or the potential burdens of life-sustaining treatments. Each makes clear and poignant the needs of patients, their families, and caregivers who are faced with decisions about—or the consequences of decisions about—the use of life-sustaining technologies.

LIBRARY  
OFFICE OF THE CLERK OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20540



JOHN H. GIBBONS  
*Director*

## Advisory Panel: Life-Sustaining Technologies and the Elderly

John W. Rowe, *Chairperson*  
Chief, Gerontology Division, Department of Medicine  
Beth Israel Hospital, Harvard Medical School

David Axelrod  
Commissioner  
New York State Department of Health

Abraham Brickner  
Director  
Health Services Research  
and Program Development  
The Cleveland Clinic Foundation

Daniel J. Callahan  
Director  
The Hastings Center

A. Edward Doudera  
Harmon, Jones & Sanford  
Camden, ME

Nancy N. Dubler  
Director  
Division of Legal and Ethical Issues  
in Health Care  
Montefiore Medical Center

Rose Goldstein  
Director of Social Services  
Jewish Home and Hospital for the Aged  
Bronx, NY

Val J. Halamandaris  
President  
National Association for Home Care  
Washington, DC

William A. Knaus  
Director of I.C.U. Research  
The George Washington University  
Medical Center

Steven Lazarus  
President  
ARCH Development Corp.  
The University of Chicago

Joanne Lynn  
Associate Professor of Health Care Services  
Division of Geriatric Medicine  
The George Washington University  
Medical Center

Catherine P. Murphy  
Associate Professor  
School of Nursing  
Boston College

John J. Paris  
Professor  
Department of Religious Studies  
Holy Cross College

A-J Rock-Levinson  
Executive Director  
Concern for Dying  
New York, NY

Anne A. Scitovsky  
Chief  
Health Economics Department  
Research Institute  
Palo Alto Medical Foundation

Victor W. Sidel  
Distinguished University Professor  
of Social Medicine  
Montefiore Medical Center  
Albert Einstein College of Medicine

R. Knight Steel  
Professor of Medicine  
Geriatrics Section  
Boston University Medical Center

William A. Wendt  
Executive Director  
The St. Francis Center  
Washington, DC

Terrie T. Wetle  
Assistant Professor of Medicine  
Division of Health Policy  
Harvard Medical School

Mary Opal Wolanin  
Professor Emerita  
College of Nursing  
University of Arizona

**NOTE:** OTA appreciates and is grateful for the valuable assistance and thoughtful critiques provided by the advisory panel members. The panel does not, however, necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this report. OTA assumes full responsibility for the report and the accuracy of its contents.

# OTA Project Staff—Life-Sustaining Technologies and the Elderly

Roger C. Herdman, *Assistant Director, Health and Life Sciences Division*

Gretchen S. Kolsrud, *Biological Applications Program Manager*

Claire W. Maklan, *Project Co-Director*

Katie Maslow, *Project Co-Director*

Robert A. Harootyan, *Project Director<sup>1</sup>*

Gladys B. White, *Analyst*

Hindy J. Shaman, *Research Assistant*

Blake M. Cornish, *Research Assistant*

Judy K. Kosovich, *Legal Analyst*

Anne M. Guthrie, *Research Assistant*

Everett C. Hills, *Research Assistant*

## Support Staff

Sharon Kay Oatman, *Administrative Assistant*

Linda Rayford, *Secretary/Word Processor Specialist*

Barbara Ketchum, *Secretary*

Kerry Kemp, *Division Editor*

Chris Elfring, *Editor*

## Special Contributors

Nancy B. Cummings

Kathryn S. Aultman

Lisa J. Raines

---

<sup>1</sup>Until June 1986.