

# Thursday lecture features lessons learned from Terri Schiavo's death

Candace McKibben, Special to the Democrat    Published 1:16 p.m. ET Nov. 6, 2017



*(Photo: Candace McKibben)*

For a year now, a group of committed citizens has met monthly to discuss ways to encourage advance health care planning in our community. We heard an excellent community presentation, "It's Okay to Die," by Dr. Monica Williams-Murphy, an ER physician from Huntsville, Alabama, in September 2016.

As a follow-up, 14 people from various agencies in our community agreed to meet and discuss next steps. Facilitated by Big Bend Hospice, this creative task force has produced some awareness materials, held several events to encourage advance care planning, and considered ways to encourage this planning among the younger adult population in Tallahassee.

Our work is culminating in bringing Dr. Jay Wolfson, court-appointed Guardian Ad-Litem for Terri Schiavo, to Tallahassee on Thursday, to share some of what he learned from his involvement in this case.

I am not sure when I first became aware of Schiavo, but she was on the public radar long before her well-publicized death in March 2005. As a young woman, Terri suffered a cardiac arrest in February 1990 resulting in severe lack of oxygen and brain damage. Physicians determined that she was in a persistent vegetative state and only her brain stem remained functional.

In the beginning, her husband Michael and her parents, Mary and Bob Schlinder, cared for her together. After four years, the physicians told them that there was nothing more they could do for Terri. Four years after that, in 1998, Terri's husband petitioned to have her feeding tube removed because he was sure that his wife would not want to live in her very limited condition based on conversations they had at the funerals of two family members who had been on life support.

But since she had no living will and her parents contested the removal, along with the media interest on both sides of the issue, the decision was brought to the state courts.

According to Dr. Arthur Caplan, Professor of Bioethics at New York University's Langone Medical Center, who has written a book about Schiavo, it is the most litigated case in the history of bioethics, with 19 judges hearing the case and concurring with her husband.



**What are the medical and ethical lessons from the Terri Schiavo case? Dr. Jay Wolfson, who was appointed as special guardian for Schiavo, will discuss the issues 6:30 p.m. Thursday at the Florida State University law school. (Photo: Saklakov, Getty Images/iStockphoto)**

When at last the feeding tube was removed, the Florida Legislature in 2003 enacted “Terri’s Law,” giving then-Gov. Jeb Bush authority to reattach the feeding tube. After a number of appeals, in 2005, the Congress and President George Bush intervened, but a federal judge’s denial of these actions on the basis of unconstitutionality allowed for the removal of the feeding tube on March 18, 2005, and her ultimate death 14 days later, on March 31.

During the challenge of Terri’s Law, Gov. Bush appointed Dr. Jay Wolfson, as special guardian for Schiavo for 30 days, to read and review her voluminous record and make a report to him and the Florida courts on her condition. On Thursday evening, from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at the Rotunda of the FSU College of Law, 308 Martin Luther King Boulevard S., Wolfson, Professor of Public Health and Medicine, at the University of South Florida will share lessons learned from Schiavo.

Free copies of Five Wishes will be available as well as helpful materials from area agencies.

Sponsored by Big Bend Hospice and the FSU College of Medicine and College of Law Center for Innovative Collaboration in Medicine and Law, the event is free as is parking at the Civic Center just across the street from the Law School.

For more information, please contact Candace McKibben, [candace@bigbendhospice.org](mailto:candace@bigbendhospice.org) or 850-878-5310. Our task force warmly invites you to join us for an informative and inspiring evening.

## If you go

**What:** Lessons Learned from Schiavo

**Who:** Dr. Jay Wolfson, Special Guardian Ad Litem, for Terri Schiavo, reporting to then Gov. Bush and The Florida Courts

**Where:** FSU College of Law Rotunda, 308 M.L. King Boulevard S. Tallahassee Florida

**When:** 6:30-8 p.m. Thursday

**Cost:** Free

**Educational Credit:** 1.5 CEUs for Nursing and Social Work, free

**Parking:** Free at the Civic Center across from the FSU College of Law and the Law School Faculty/Staff Lot behind the Roberts Building

**Contact:** Candace McKibben, 850-878-5310 or [candace@bigbendhospice.org](mailto:candace@bigbendhospice.org)

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