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## Ethical questions in the treatment of subjects with dementia. Part I: Respecting autonomy: awareness, competence and behavioural disorders

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### Introduction

Respect for autonomy is universally regarded as a fundamental ethical principle, but there is disagreement as to how much weight it should be given in relation to other fundamental principles. Although dementia is characterised by a progressive loss of the capacities on which autonomy is based, this Study Group believes that the therapeutic relationship should not only respect, but actually promote the autonomy remaining during the different phases of the disease in order to define shared existential, therapeutic and welfare objectives, and avoid “automatic” decisions and practices relating (for example) to institutionalisation and life support treatments.

The aim of this paper is to document the possibility of helping patients to preserve their decision-making autonomy as long as possible, also by having recourse to juridical instruments such as advance healthcare directives, the appointment of a proxy to make healthcare decisions and the

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