

MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH CARE

Advance Directives are forms that say, in advance, what kind of treatment you want or do not want under serious medical conditions. Some conditions, if severe, may make you unable to tell the doctor how you want to be treated at that time. Your Advance Directives will help the doctor to provide the care you would wish to have.

Most hospitals and home health organizations are required to provide you with information on Advance Directives. Many are required to ask you if you already have Advance Directives prepared.

This pamphlet has been designed to give you information and may help you with important decisions. Laws regarding Advance Directives vary from state to state. We recommend that you consult with your family, close friends, your physician, and perhaps even a social worker or lawyer regarding your individual needs and what may benefit you the most.

What Kinds Of Advance Directives Are There?

There are two basic types of Advance Directives available. One is called a Living Will. The other is called a Durable Power of Attorney.

A Living Will gives information on the kind of medical care you want (or do not want) if you become terminally ill and unable to make your own decision. It is called a "Living" Will because it takes effect while you are living.

- Many states have specific forms that must be used for a Living Will to be considered legally binding. These forms may be available from a social services office, law office, or possibly a library.
- In some states, you are allowed to simply write a letter describing what treatments you want or do not want.
- In all cases, your Living Will must be signed, witnessed, and dated. Some states require verification.

A Durable Power of Attorney is a legal agreement that names another person (frequently a spouse, family member, or close friend) as an agent or proxy. This person would then be making medical decisions for you if you should become unable to make them for yourself. A Durable Power of Attorney can also include instructions regarding specific treatments that you want or do not want in the event of serious illness.

What Type of Advance Directive is Best for Me?

- This is not a simple question to answer. Each individual's situation and preferences are unique.
- For many persons, the answer depends on their specific situation, or personal desires for their health care.
- Sometimes the answer depends on the state in which you live. In some states, it is better to have one versus the other.
- Many times, you can have both, either as separate forms or as a single combined form.

What Do I Do If I Want An Advance Directive?

- First, consult with your physician's office or home care agency about where to get information specific to your state.
- Once you have discussed the options available, consult with any family members or friends who may be involved in your medical care. This is extremely important if you have chosen a friend or family member as your "agent" in the Durable Power of Attorney.
- Be sure to follow all requirements in your state for your signature, witness signature, notarization (if required), and filing.
- You should provide copies of your Advance Directive(s) to people you trust, such as close family members, friends and/or caregivers. The original document should be filed in a secure location known to those to whom you give copies.
- Keep another copy in a secure location; if you have a lawyer, he or she will keep a copy as well.

How Does My Health Care Team Know I Have an Advance Directive?

- You must tell them. Many organizations and hospitals are required to ask you if you have one. Even so, it is a good idea to tell your physicians and nurses that you have an Advance Directive, and where the document can be found.
- Many patients keep a small card in their wallet that states the type of Advance Directive they have, where a copy of the document(s) is located, and a contact person, such as your Durable Power of Attorney "agent," and how to contact them.

What If I Change My Mind?

- You can change your mind about any part of your Advance Directive, or even about having an Advance Directive, at any time.
- If you would like to cancel or make changes to the document(s), it is very important that you follow the same signature, dating, and witness procedure as the first time, and that you make sure all original versions are deleted or discarded, and that all health care providers, your caregiver(s), your family and friends have a revised copy.

What If I Do Not Want An Advance Directive?

You are not required by law to have one. Many home care companies are required to provide you with this basic information, but what you choose to do with it is entirely up to you.

For More Information...

This pamphlet has been designed to provide you with basic information. It is not a substitute for consultation with an experienced lawyer or knowledgeable social worker. These persons, or your home care agency, can best answer more detailed questions, and help guide you towards the best Advance Directive for you.