



ADVANCE MEDICAL DIRECTIVES

WHAT ARE ADVANCE MEDICAL DIRECTIVES?

They could be a living will or a durable power of attorney for health care (also called a health-care proxy). Either document allows you to give directions about your future medical care.

It's your right

to accept or refuse medical care. Advance directives can protect this right if you ever become mentally or physically unable to choose or communicate your wishes due to an injury or illness.

WHY LEARN ABOUT ADVANCE DIRECTIVES?

Because they're valuable tools! Advance directives can help:

You protect your right to make medical choices that can affect your life.

Your family avoid the responsibility --- and stress – of making difficult decisions.

Your physician by providing guidelines for your care.

ALL PATIENTS HAVE RIGHTS.

These include the right to:

PRIVACY

Your personal and medical information is confidential. Medical records and communications with your physician must be kept private.

"INFORMED CONSENT"

Your physician must clearly explain the advantages and risks of any procedures, tests or treatments. You must give your permission for such care. You have the right to refuse any treatment.

INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR CONDITION

You must be kept up to date about your medical condition, treatments and chances for recovery.

INFORMATION ABOUT ADVANCE DIRECTIVES

In most cases, advance directives and your rights as a patient must be explained to you.

ADVANCE DIRECTIVES CAN PROTECT PEOPLE IN EXTREME CONDITIONS.

These people may be unable to communicate due to a condition such as:

Irreversible brain damage or brain disease, which can affect their ability to think as well as communicate.

Permanent coma (or other unconscious states), which leave them unconscious and without hope of recovery.

Terminal illness – a condition from which a person is expected to die within a short period of time (these illnesses may lead to brain damage and loss of consciousness).

ADVANCE DIRECTIVES CAN LIMIT LIFE-PROLONGING MEASURES:

When there is little or no chance of recovery.

For example, advance directives may enable patients to make their feelings known about:

Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) -- used to restore stopped breathing and/or heartbeat.

Intravenous (IV) therapy -- used to provide food, water and/or medication through a tube placed in a vein.

Feeding tubes -- inserted through the nose, throat, etc., to provide nutrition.

Respirators – machines used to keep patients breathing.

Dialysis – a method of cleaning patients' blood by machine, when kidneys no longer work properly.

Advance directives can address pain relief, too – either requesting or refusing it.

UNDERSTAND THE TWO TYPES OF ADVANCE DIRECTIVES.

LIVING WILLS

These are written instructions that explain your wishes regarding health care should you have a terminal condition. They are called "living" wills because they take effect while a patient is still alive.

DURABLE POWER OF ATTORNEY FOR HEALTH CARE

In a written document, you can name a person (called a proxy) to make decisions for you if you become unable to do so.

Even if your state does not recognize living wills, you may want one in addition to a durable power of attorney for health care. This may express your wishes as completely as possible. Your state may have special forms to use.

LET YOUR VALUES BE YOUR GUIDE when creating advance directives.

Consider what's important to you.

Which of these statements express how you think you'd feel if you were near death?

- It's important for me to die without pain and suffering.
- It's important for me to leave my family with good memories.
- It's important for me to act according to my religious beliefs.
- It's important for me to be able to make my own decisions.
- It's important for me to not burden my family with difficult decisions.
- It's important for me to be with my loved ones at death.

Consider the medical possibilities.

Imagine yourself:

- In a coma (or other unconscious condition)
- With permanent brain damage
- Terminally ill.

Then – ask yourself which one of these statements best describes your feelings:

1. It is important to me to prolong life, regardless of pain, chances for recovery and cost.
2. I prefer to avoid life-prolonging measures if the chances for recovery are not good.

Discuss your responses with:

- Family and friends
- Your physician
- Clergy
- Your lawyer

HOW DO I CREATE ADVANCE DIRECTIVES?

Here are some steps to follow:

Check the laws in your state regarding living wills and durable power of attorney for health care.

Put your wishes in writing, and be as specific as possible (forms may be available from the sources listed below).

Sign and date your advance directives and have them witnessed and notarized, if necessary in your state.

Keep a card in your wallet stating that you have advance directives (and where to find them).

Give your physician a copy to be kept as part of your medical records. If you use a durable power of attorney for health care, be sure to give a copy to your proxy.

Discuss your advance directives with your family, friends and proxy. Give copies to a relative or friend who is likely to be notified in an emergency.

Review your advance directives regularly and make changes as necessary. Inform your physician, family and proxy of any changes.

SOME SPECIAL ISSUES

You may want to consider:

“Do not resuscitate” (DNR) orders

A DNR order allows you to refuse attempts to restore heartbeat. Discuss this option with your physician.

Organ Donation

Advance directives can state your wishes to donate specific organs (or your entire body).

Specific treatments and procedures

In addition to pain control, you may request or refuse tube feeding and other medical procedures.

SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Can I refuse treatment for my child?

You may in some cases, depending on a medical evaluation of the:

- child’s condition
- chances of recovery
- expected effects of treatment

What if I change my mind after I fill out my advance directives?

If you are a competent adult, you can always change or cancel your advance directives. In some cases, you may even cancel them orally.

My relative has valid advance directives – can I prevent them from taking effect?

Generally no, unless you can prove that the relative was not thinking clearly when he or she created them.

HELP AND INFORMATION ARE AVAILABLE.**If you need help in preparing advance directives, or if you'd like more information, contact:**

- A lawyer
- hospitals, hospices, home health agencies and long-term care facilities
- your state attorney general's office

Choice in Dying

200 Varick Street, 10th Floor
New York, NY 10014-4810
1-800-989-WILL (1-800-989-9455)

CONSIDER ADVANCE DIRECTIVES IN YOUR HEALTH-CARE PLANNING

Know your rights – and take steps to protect them.

Discuss your wishes with your family, proxy and physician.

Review your advance directives and make sure they express your wishes clearly.

PLANNING IS THE KEY TO PROTECTING YOUR RIGHTS!