



ADVANCE CARE PLANNING

Advance care planning starts with thinking about what is most important to you—now and in the future. Whether or not you’ve experienced a life-threatening illness or accident, it’s never too soon to start thinking about life and death issues: your wishes at end of life, who will speak for you if you are unable to speak for yourself and how you want your assets distributed. Although no one likes thinking about death, it’s something we all have to come to terms with. The healthier you are when you begin the process, the better off you and your loved ones will be.

By documenting your wishes and designating one or more family members or friends who can speak on your behalf, you have the comfort of knowing your preferences will be carried out. You can make it easier for your loved ones by making sure they understand your choices.

WHAT’S INVOLVED IN ADVANCE CARE PLANNING?

Tools for Advance Care Planning

- An advance directive
- A durable power of attorney (POA) form
- A will

The next step is to discuss treatment choices with your doctors. If you haven’t already done so, start by asking yourself some key questions: Is independence essential for you? Do you want to be able to take part in activities that you enjoy? Do you want to be able to continue your involvement with sports, music, taking care of grandchildren or any number of other activities? Sometimes treatments can be chosen that will make it more likely for you to keep doing the things that are most meaningful to you.

The first step in this process is thinking about what is most important to you. You may want to include one or more people who are close to you to join you in this process. The

An advance directive, sometimes called a “living will,” spells out the kind of medical treatment you would choose if you were incapacitated or terminally ill and unable to speak for yourself. It is

One source for an advance directive form that is easy to complete, provides helpful guidance and is valid in most states is called *Five Wishes*. It is available at <http://www.agingwithdignity.org> (click on the *Five Wishes* links for information or to download or order a copy of the form).

Another website, the *Conversation Project* (<http://theconversationproject.org>), includes resources to help you talk about your wishes for end-of-life care. It’s designed to make the process easier by helping you pull together your thoughts and introduce the subject to your loved ones.

important for the doctors treating you to know your wishes so that they can honor them. An advance directive also ensures that family members understand what medical care you want and don’t want. This will reduce the chances that your loved ones will disagree or not know how to act if you can’t speak for yourself.

The accepted format of an advance directive depends on the state where you live. You can obtain a form that is valid in your state from your clinic or hospital. It’s not necessary to have a lawyer involved, although you may do so if you wish. But you may want to see a lawyer to create a durable power of attorney for health care and a will. The durable power of attorney for health care designates someone (called an “attorney-in-fact” or “proxy”) who can speak for you on a range of health care decisions if you can’t speak for yourself. In contrast, a regular power of attorney form typically covers only financial matters, but designation of a power of attorney on health care and financial issues can be combined into one document.



Once you complete your advance directive and/or durable power of attorney for health care form, be sure to give a copy of both to the person (or persons) you've designated as your health care agent. You should also discuss your wishes with your doctors and make sure they have a copy of the advance directive in your medical records. It's important to review these forms from time to time and make changes if your circumstances or preferences change.

A will can include as much information as you wish regarding how you want your assets distributed after your death. You will need to specify someone to be the executor of your estate. This person will implement your wishes after your death. Having these forms in place will greatly simplify the process for your heirs (your spouse, partner, children or others you choose to designate).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Aging with Dignity: <http://www.agingwithdignity.org>
(click on the Five Wishes links for information or to download or order a copy of the form)

AARP: <http://www.aarp.org> (search for "advance directive")

Help Guide: <http://www.helpguide.org>
(search for "advance directive")

Caring Connections: <http://www.caringinfo.org>
(click on the "Planning Ahead" link)

The Conversation Project: <http://theconversationproject.org>

You can also request an advance directive form from your hospital or clinic.

Contact your Employee Assistance Program to find out about any free or discounted services they can provide.