# Let's Talk ABOUT...

#### **Advance care directives**

An advance care directive is a legal document (a signed legal paper). Anyone age 18 and older can have an advance directive. It lets you identify an agent and record your health care wishes in writing in case you can't speak for yourself because you're ill or injured. It also helps you tell others about these decisions. An advance care directive is legal throughout the United States. The law about advance care directives is a little different in different states, so it is important to complete an advance care directive form that follows the law in the state where you live or receive medical care.

Depending on the form you use, an advance directive allows you to do one or both of the following:

# Designate a Health Care Power of Attorney (My Agent)

- You can name a person you trust (who must be at least 18 years old) as your health care agent. A health care agent is a person who can make health care decisions for you when you cannot make decisions or speak for yourself. They speak for you if you can't speak for yourself because you're too ill or too injured.
- It is important that you talk to your agent about the health care you want.

# Express your wishes for Health Care (Living Will)

 You can record your wishes in writing about health care you want in the future. You can choose the kind of care and treatment you want provided or withheld in certain situations. If illness or injury prevent you from making or communicating decisions for yourself, the directive can guide your medical care and help make sure your wishes are honored.

## How will an advance care directive benefit me and my family?

- It lets you tell people about medical treatments you want when you are unconscious or too ill to communicate.
- It lets you tell people who you want to speak for you and decide your medical care. They will speak for you if you can't speak for yourself because you are too ill or too injured.
- It gives you peace of mind because the person you trust will direct your care.

#### Creating an advance care directive, it's all about talking...

Talking about these issues can be hard for anyone. It's up to you to express your wishes.

- Talk about your thoughts, concerns, and choices with your family and friends.
- Talk to your doctor about your treatment choices, what treatments your doctor will do for you, and what the risks are.
- It's your right. You can accept or refuse any treatment or surgery. This includes even things that are keeping you from dying like a breathing machine or CPR. You can say you don't want these things. You can say they should be stopped at any time.
- Use an advance care directive. Write down the treatments you would want if you were no longer able to speak for yourself.
- Choose a person you trust who is willing to speak for you if you cannot speak for yourself.
   Appoint this person as your health care agent by completing and signing the advance directive form. If you regain your ability to decide, your agent cannot continue to act for you. You will make your own decisions, then.

- You can get an advance directive packet from your doctor or at the hospital.
- Keep a copy of your advance care directive. Give
  photocopies of the signed originals to your
  family, friends, and doctors. Give a copy to the
  hospital when you are admitted for care. This
  makes your care givers aware of your wishes so
  they can honor them.

### Other information about advanced care directives

Your care givers will follow your advance care directive if at all possible.

You can change your advance care directive at any time. An advance care directive remains in effect until you change it. If you make a new advance care directive, it cancels the previous one. It is important to review your advance care directive every once in a while so it still says what you want. If you want to change anything in an advance care directive once you have completed it, you should complete a new one.

