

Let's Talk About...

Advance Directives

An Advance Directive is a legal document (a signed legal paper). It lets you plan your future medical care 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 Directive is legal throughout the United States. The law about advance directives is a little different in different states, so it is important to complete an advance directive that follows the law where you are.

The following forms are "Advance Directives". Each one has a different purpose:

Living Will

- Is a signed legal paper that lets you tell the medical care you want in the future. You have to be at least 18 years old. You also have to be dying or in a persistent vegetative state. A persistent vegetative state is when a person has such a bad brain injury that they are not aware of anything anymore.

Special Power of Attorney

- This signed legal paper lets you 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 decide your medical care. 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 Special Power of Attorney about the medical care you want if you cannot speak for yourself.

Medical Treatment Plan

- Is a written statement about the medical treatment plans you have discussed with your doctor. It is especially helpful if you have a serious injury, disease or illness.

How will an Advance Directive benefit you and your family?

- It lets you tell people about medical treatments you want, even if 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 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 Directive, it's all about talking...

Talking about end-of-life issues can be hard for anyone. It's up to you to express your wishes.

- 1** Talk about your thoughts, concerns and choices with your family and friends.
- 2** Talk to your doctor about your treatment choices, what treatments your doctor will do for you and what the risks are.
- 3** 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.
- 4** Use an advance directive. Write down the treatments you would want if you were no longer able to speak for yourself.
- 5** 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 filling out the Special Power of Attorney form. If you get back your ability to decide, your agent cannot

continue to act for you. You will make your own decisions, then.

- 6** You can get an Advance Directive packet from your doctor or at the Hospital.
- 7** Keep a copy of your Advance 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.

You can change your Advance Directive at any time...

An advance directive remains into effect until you change it. If you make a new advance directive, it cancels the previous one. It's important to review your advance directive every once in a while so it still says what you want. If you want to change anything in an advance directive once you have completed it, you should complete a new one.



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