

APRIL:

ADVANCE DIRECTIVES

This month we recognize the work of health information managers, and included in your records, there should be an advance healthcare directive!

WHAT IS AN ADVANCE DIRECTIVE?

An advance directive is a form that you fill out to describe the kinds of medical care you want to have if something happens and you cannot speak for yourself. It tells your doctors, your family (or other person[s] given this responsibility) what to do if you're badly hurt or have a serious illness that keeps you from saying what you want.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES?

There are two main types of advance directives:

- A **LIVING WILL** tells your family and doctor what kinds of treatment you want to receive as you near the end of your life, and can no longer speak for yourself. It is also called a "treatment directive".
- A **MEDICAL POWER OF ATTORNEY** lets you name a person (or persons) to make treatment decisions for you when you can't speak for yourself. This person is called a healthcare agent or health care proxy. The form generally consists of several sections: one part is used to designate the power of attorney, naming the individual who will make health care decisions for you if you are not able to do so yourself (you can also name an alternate agent, who will make the decisions if the first agent is unable or cannot be reached by your care givers); another part allows you to give specific instructions about any aspect of your healthcare whether or not you appoint an agent; another part may allow you to express your wishes about donating body organs or tissues following your death; each state's forms are different, so some of this information may need to be added in a sentence or paragraph of "other wishes".

As long as you can still make your own decisions and express your wishes clearly, your advance directive won't have to be used. You can say "start", "stop", "yes" or "no" to treatment at any time.

HOW TO WRITE AN ADVANCE DIRECTIVE...

As you prepare your advance directive, you'll need to follow these important steps:

1. get the living will and medical power of attorney forms for your state (they differ in each state, so be sure to get the right ones for where you live)
2. choose your healthcare agent – this should be a

person you trust to make decisions *for* you, whom you believe will carry out *your* wishes as you have described them

3. fill out the forms, and have them witnessed as your state requires
4. give copies to your family, your doctor and your health care agent(s)

You can often get the forms in a doctor's office, hospital, law office, state or local office for the aging, senior centers or nursing homes. You can also get them online at www.caringinfo.org or by calling 1-800-658-8898.

When you write your advance directive, think about the kinds of treatments that you do or don't want to receive if you get seriously ill or injured. Consider whether you would want to:

- Receive cardiopulmonary resuscitation ("CPR") if your heart stops
- Be on a machine that pumps air into your lungs through a tube in your nose or throat if you can't breathe on your own
- Be on a machine that cleans your blood if your kidneys stop working (dialysis)
- Be fed or given fluids through a tube if you can't eat or drink
- Take medicines to treat serious infections

These are tough choices to make, but you don't have to make them alone. Take your time; share your questions and concerns with your doctor, nurse, lawyer, family and friends.



WHAT IF I CHANGE MY MIND?

You can change your mind or cancel your directive at any time. Your directive remains in effect until you revoke it. Just fill out a new form and get rid of your existing forms. Be sure to inform everyone who has a copy of the original directive. Don't just cross out or add new information, unless it's only to change your address or phone number.

YOU MAY HAVE MORE QUESTIONS...

Will my advance directives be honored in another state? Do I need an attorney's assistance? How do I know I'm including the right information? Many Senior Centers or Offices on Aging offer workshops or assistance in answering your questions and completing the forms.

For more information, go to

www.webmd.com/balancd/questions-answers-advance-directives-medref

or

www.webmd.com/healthy-aging/tc/writing-an-advance-directive-topic-overview

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