

LIVING WILLS & ADVANCE MEDICAL DIRECTIVES

What Is An Advance Directive?

An Advance Directive is a general term that describes two types of legal documents that speak for you in the event of incapacity:

1. Living Will
2. Medical Power of Attorney
 - A Living Will allows you to document your wishes concerning medical treatments at the end of life.
 - A Medical Power of Attorney allows you to appoint a person you trust as your health care agent, who is authorized to make decisions on your behalf.

Start The Conversation

Good advance planning for health care decisions is a continuing conversation about:

- o values
- o priorities
- o the meaning of one's life
- o quality of life

Communication Is The Key

Studies have shown advance directive forms do little to influence end of life decisions without informed, thoughtful reflection about your wishes and values. Personal communication between the patient and the likely decision makers before a crisis occurs.

Concepts For Talking About Health Care Issues

1. How do you want to be treated?
2. Are there treatments you want to receive or refuse?
3. What are you afraid might happen if you can't make decisions for yourself?
4. Do you have any fears about the medical treatments you may want to receive?
5. What is frightening to you?
6. What do some phrases actually mean to you?
 - o *no heroic measures*
 - o *dying with dignity*

Who defines these terms? What do they mean?

How To Select A Health Care Proxy

There are several things to think about. Name one person to serve at a time. Choose one successor or back-up person in case the first person is not available when needed.

Qualities Of An Appointed Health Care Proxy

1. Your health care proxy would be willing to speak on your behalf.
2. Would be able to act on your wishes and separate his/her own feelings from yours
3. Lives close by or could travel to be at your side if needed.
4. Knows you well and understands what's important to you.
5. Could handle the responsibility.
6. Will talk with you now about sensitive issues and will listen to your wishes.
7. Will likely be available long into the future.
8. Would be able to handle conflicting opinions between family members, friends and medical personnel.
9. Can be a strong advocate in the face of an unresponsive doctor or institution.

Who Should Not Be An Appointed Health Care Proxy

The most common groups disqualified:

1. Anyone under age 18.
2. Your health care provider. An employee of your health care provider unless this person is your spouse or close relative

After You Select A Health Care Proxy

1. Ask permission to name him or her as your proxy.
2. Discuss your health care wishes and values and fears.
3. Make sure your proxy gets an original copy of your advance directive.
4. Tell family members and close friends who you picked.

Five Times To Re-Examine Your Health Care Wishes


1. Before each annual physical exam.
2. At the start of each decade of your life.
3. After any major life change – such as a birth in the family, marriage, divorce, re-marriage, and especially after the death of a loved one.
4. After any major medical change such as being diagnosed with a serious disease or terminal illness. Or if such conditions worsen.
5. After losing your ability to live independently.

If Your Wishes Change

1. Make a new advance directive if your old one no longer reflects your wishes.
2. Ask about the proper way to cancel or amend your existing directive.
3. If you change your advance directive, it is important to notify everyone who has copies of your old medical directive forms.

What To Do With Your Advance Directive

1. Keep the original copy some place where it can be easily found.
2. Give your chosen proxy a copy. Make sure your proxy knows where to find the original.
3. Give your doctor a copy of your directive. Make certain it is put in your medical record. Make sure your doctor will support your wishes. If your doctor has objections, you need to work them out or find another doctor.
4. Carry an advance directive wallet card with you.
5. If entering a hospital or nursing home, take a copy with you and ask that it be placed in your medical record.

 Continuum Care, Inc.

Hospice of St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John

St. Croix 340.718.LOVE (5683) • St. Thomas & St. John 340.714.CARE (2273) • www.ccivi.com