

Advance Medical Directives: For patients over 18 years of age

What are advance medical directives?

They are legal papers that let you tell others how you would like to be cared for if you can no longer make decisions for yourself.

What are my rights?

- It is your right to accept or refuse medical care. Advance directives can help protect this right if you cannot make your wishes known due to an injury or illness.
- As a patient, you have a right to know about advance directives. Staff will be available upon request to explain and answer your questions.

Who benefits from them?

- Advanced directives can help protect your right to make medical choices that can affect your life.
- They also help your family make decisions on your behalf and give your doctor guidelines for your care.

There are two kinds of advance directives.

You can have either one or both kinds of advance directives.

1. Power of attorney for healthcare.

This is a written legal paper. You must name a person (called a health care agent) who will make decisions for you if you are not able to do so. This person should be someone you know well and trust. They will make decisions for you only if you cannot do so (also called incapacitated). Your doctor decides if you can make decisions.

2. Living wills.

These are legal papers that tell your doctor and others about the kind of health care you want when you are ill and cannot make decisions. The living will takes effect **only** if you are dying or in a persistent vegetative state. Two doctors or your doctor and a licensed psychologist determine this.

What should I think about when I am starting to make the directives?

Let your values be your guide. Think about what is important to you. If you could not speak for yourself, would it be important for you to:

- Have made your own decisions and not burden your family with difficult decisions?
- Act within your religious beliefs?
- Prolong life, even if there is little chance of recovery?
- Be with your family and loved ones at death?
- Die without pain and suffering?
- Donate an organ(s) or part(s) of your body.
- Other things important to you.

What medical procedures are covered in an advance directive?

You can limit procedures that would prolong life when there is little or no chance of recovery.

Make your limits known about:

- CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) – procedure that tries to bring breathing and/or a heartbeat back once it has stopped.
- IV treatment (intravenous) – a catheter placed in your vein to give medicine, fluid and nutrition.
- Feeding tube use – a tube that is placed through the nose, throat or stomach to give nutrition, food and water when you can no longer eat or drink.
- Respirator/Ventilator – a machine that is used to keep you breathing when you are not able to breathe on your own.
- Dialysis – a machine to remove harmful substances from your blood when your kidneys are failing.
- Pain relief – a plan of care to give or not give medicines and treatments for pain relief.
- Other treatments or procedures.

How do I make advance directives?

1. Check state laws about living wills and durable powers of attorney for health care.
2. Put your wishes in writing, using an approved form. Be as specific as you can.
3. Sign and date your advance directives with two witnesses not related to you.
4. Keep a card in your wallet to let others know you have advance directives and where to find it.
5. Talk with your family and friends about your advance directives. Give a copy to anyone who might be notified in an emergency.
6. Review your advance directives regularly and make changes as needed. Update copies you have given to others.
7. Make copies and give them to the person who will make decisions for you (your health care agent), your doctor and any other staff giving you care.

What if I change my mind?

As long as you are able to making decisions, you can cancel your advance directives by telling your doctor and health care agent.

Can anyone stop it from taking effect?

No, unless they can prove you were not thinking clearly when you created the living will.

Who can help me make one?

- A social worker or chaplain (while in the hospital).
- A lawyer.
- A hospital, hospice, home health agency or long-term care facility.
- Your state attorney general's office.
- Choice In Dying, 200 Varick Street, New York, NY 10014.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to provide you with additional information about your child's care. Diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up should be provided by your health care professional.