



WHO WILL MAKE YOUR HEALTHCARE DECISIONS IF YOU CAN'T?

What will happen if you become too sick to make your own medical decisions? Family members and doctors usually make those decisions, and sometimes they're not sure what you want. With an advance directive, you decide who will make those decisions and make your own wishes clear.

What is an Advance Healthcare Directive?

It's a form you fill out advising what you want done in the event of a serious injury or illness and can't speak for yourself.

An Advance Healthcare Directive accomplishes two things. First, you can name a relative or friend to be your "agent" to make medical decisions if you can't. Second, you can give instructions about your healthcare.

Do you need a lawyer to help fill out the form?

You can talk with a lawyer if you think it would be helpful, but the forms give a clear directions about how to complete them so you don't have to. Your hospice social worker can answer questions about the form and how to complete it.

When Should I make an Advance Healthcare Directive?

Completing an Advance Healthcare Directive is a natural part of planning for your future. You can complete it at any time before you become too ill to make your own decisions.

Who can I name as my agent?

You can name anyone over the age of 18. You cannot name any of your healthcare providers such as your doctor or nurse, or any employee of your healthcare providers, unless they are related to you.

Your agent should be someone you feel comfortable talking with. Your agent should know your values and what's important to you—it should be someone you trust to do what you want and someone who can stand up for what you want. These decisions can be extremely difficult. You should also name a second choice for agent in case your first choice can't do it.

What are the responsibilities of an agent?

Your agent will make critical decisions about your health care if you can't—following any guidelines you have set out. If you don't write specific instructions on the Advance Healthcare Directive form, your agent will make decisions based on their understanding of your wishes and what they think would be best for you under the circumstances.

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ADVANCE HEALTHCARE DIRECTIVE

Whether or not you write specific instructions, talk with your agent, your family, and your hospice team about how you feel about treatment decisions. You may also want to consult a minister, priest, or rabbi to help you through this difficult process. Make sure everyone involved understands what you want and why you feel the way you do.

What else is my agent permitted to decide?

Unless you limit what decisions your agent can make, they could decide anything including:

- Will you be an organ donor?
- Will there be an autopsy?
- What kind of funeral/burial arrangements will you have?

This is why it's best to tell your agent how you feel and to write down what you want.

What do I do with the form once I've filled it out?

1. Sign and date the form.
2. Your signature must either have two witnesses, or be notarized. Please review the following to make sure your signature is correctly witnessed.
 - All witnesses must be 18 or older.
 - Your witnesses may be anyone other than your healthcare provider or your agent.
 - In addition, one witness cannot be related to you and cannot be entitled to any inheritance from you.
 - If you are in a nursing home, one witness **MUST** be an ombudsman.
3. Tell your agent, family and hospice team that you have an Advance Healthcare Directive.
4. A copy should be given to your agent, one to your second-choice agent, and one to your hospice Social Worker.

What If I change my mind or want to add something?

You can cancel the form by telling your agent, your family or your hospice team that you've changed your mind. Destroy any copies of the old form that you can find.

If you want to add or change something, it's better to fill out a new form which will overrule any earlier forms. Be sure to give copies of the new form to anyone who has a copy of the first form.

Is the form good as long as I don't change my mind?

Unless you specify a shorter time period, your Advance Healthcare Directive is good until you cancel it or write a new one. If you name your spouse as agent and then divorce, your former spouse stops being your agent. If you wrote your wishes on the form, our doctors could still use them to make treatment decisions for you if that happens.

Why are Advance Healthcare Directives important?

When you can't participate in making decisions about your treatment, someone else has to make them. Making clear plans now insures everyone will know exactly what you want. It also relieves your family, friends and hospice team of the burden of trying to guess what your wishes would be and it avoids potentially hurtful disagreements.

If you have more questions about Advance Healthcare Directives, please ask your Community Hospice Social Worker for help.

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