

Advance Directives

“Don’t turn away from me in this time of my distress. Bend down your ear and give me speedy answers, for my days disappear like smoke.” (Psalms 102:2)

Patients all have the right to accept or decline treatment as they see fit. A doctor or nurse cannot treat you or do a procedure unless you give them permission first. However, this truth applies to competent adults only. When someone cannot make their own decisions due to a temporary or long term condition, someone else **must** make all decisions relating to that person’s health care.

To make sure you are treated exactly the way you wish, consider filling out an Advance Directive. There are two types of Advance Directives. A Durable power of attorney for health care allows you to appoint someone to represent you and direct these decisions. This person is known as your “patient advocate.” A Living will outlines your wishes, but does not name someone to make them for you.

The types of issues you will list should include all or at least some of the following:

- Use of breathing machines or dialysis
- Organ donation
- Tube feedings
- Resuscitation if your heart or breathing stops
- Life support if there is little or no hope of recovery
- Naming your advocate

Patient advocates can **only** make these decisions when the patient is unable to make them himself. Who ever is chosen as an advocate must agree to serve in this role. There is a place on the Durable power of attorney form for the advocate to accept the responsibility.

Putting your health care requests in writing has many positive aspects. This act makes you think through many important issues. Also, it lets your family and doctor know what your wishes are. It’s a wonderful time to bring these issues out in the open by discussing them with your family or friends. It is dangerous to assume everyone knows what you are thinking or feeling—chances are that they do not. Your written wishes can help ease some of the emotional turmoil a family feels when serious decisions need to be made.

Once you have completed an Advance Directive, give copies to your family and your doctor. Remember, every time you enter a hospital you need to give them a copy of your Advance Directive. This is because patients can change their minds at any time, and the hospital needs to know that your document reflects your current feelings.

To get an Advance Directive, or just learn more about this subject, there are several sources to explore. Forms are available at area hospitals, from your state representative, and many senior citizen groups.

Check out these informative and helpful sites:

www.puttinwriting.org

www.caringinfo.org

www.oag.state.md.us/Healthpol/adirective.pdf