

ADVANCE DIRECTIVES

“The future depends on what we do in the present”

Mahatma Gandhi

You have the right to give instructions about your own health care. You also have the right to name someone else to make health care decisions for you. This gives you a voice in decisions about your medical treatments even if you are unconscious or too ill to communicate.

As life expectancy has increased, so too have the multiple complications associated with chronic illnesses in the last years of life. It has become essential that plans be made in advance to guide future decisions about efforts to prolong life.

Your decisions should be based on your wishes and values.

Providing your loved ones with the information they need to make medical decisions is a real gift that brings peace of mind to the people you love.

Commonly Asked Questions

What is an Advance Directive?

An Advance Directive is a legal document completed by you. You write in advance what you want done in case you have a serious injury or illness and aren't able to speak for yourself. You can name a relative or friend to speak for yourself. You can name a relative or friend you trust as your health care agent to make medical decisions for you if you can't make them yourself.

Who should I appoint as my health care agent?

- A health care agent is the person you appoint to make decisions about your medical care if you become unable to make these decisions yourself.
- It is important that you name a person as your agent who knows your goals and values and whom you trust to carry out your wishes.
- You may name a family member, but it is not necessary to do so. You might choose your spouse, an adult child, or a close friend.
- One of the strongest reasons for naming a health care agent is to have someone who can respond flexibly as your medical condition changes and can deal with situations that you did not anticipate.

Who can't be an agent?

Anyone under the age of 18. You cannot name your doctor, nurse or any other professional who is providing health care for you, or an employee of your health care provider—unless this person is a relative.

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

- You need to sign and date it and have your signature witnessed or notarized. (You don't need both a witness and a notary.)
- You need to make copies. Keep an original for yourself.
- Give a copy to your agent, one to an alternate (second-choice agent), and one to your physician, family, and friends.
- Discuss details with these individuals.
- Ask your physician to make it a part of your permanent medical record.
- Whenever you are hospitalized, take a copy with you.

What if I change my mind, or I want to add something?

If you change your mind, you can revoke the form just by telling your agent, your family, or your physician that you have changed your mind. It is best to tell everyone if you can so there will not be a mix up. It is also a good idea to tear up all the copies of the form if you can.

If you fill out a new form, it overrides all the earlier forms. If you want to change something or add something, you should start over with a new form.

How long will my Advance Directive be effective?

It is effective until the time of your death or you change or revoke it. It is recommended that you review your Advance Directive periodically, especially when there is a change in your health status.

Resources to obtain an advance directive form and more information.

www.caringinfo.org

www.agingwithdignity.org

www.finalchoices.org

www.calhealth.org

www.cmanet.org

ag.ca.gov/consumers