



Planning for the Care of Your Loved Ones

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Advanced Directives, Living Wills, Durable Power of Attorney? What do they mean? Why do we need to be aware of these things? They sound intimidating but these resources are important to the future well being of our loved ones, whether it's our aging parents, aunts, uncles or spouses/partners. Even ourselves!

In today's society we have advanced medical technology that can prolong our lives. However some people have strong opinions about what type of medical care they want to receive or not should they become ill. When people cannot speak for themselves due to illness or injury it is up to their family members or health care providers to make decisions on their behalf. This is an enormous responsibility that can be very emotional.



Advanced Directives are your plans you wish for future medical treatment should you become incapacitated by illness or accident. This means that others need to communicate your wishes to healthcare providers.

To be more specific, there are two types of advance directives. A living will is an actual written, legal document that specifies what type of medical treatment you want. It can specify under what circumstances life-sustaining treatment should be terminated. This can include artificial feeding alternatives, blood transfusion and prolonged use of a respirator to name a few.

The second type is called Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care. This is a document that identifies who can make medical decisions on your behalf if you cannot communicate your needs yourself. It is important to note that this type of document does not appoint anyone to make financial or legal decisions for you. One person usually needs to be identified as the Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care. This can help lessen any confusion if there are many siblings etc. as well. The terms Durable Power of Attorney and Healthcare Agent may no longer exist in some facilities. Instead the two are combined under the new term Healthcare Representative.

To begin the process of advanced care planning we need to communicate with our loved ones about their wishes. Even in the best of circumstances, end of life care can be a difficult topic to address. Although death is a part of the life cycle, it is something I do not like to dwell on much. I am well aware that anything can happen but I have a hard time following through with advanced directives. I have had conversations with my family about their wishes and mine but actually doing it is another story....until I began doing research for this topic!



Research funded by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality have shown the following benefits to advanced care planning:

- People who have done advanced care planning seemed to have less fear and anxiety, felt more empowered about their health care and felt their doctor had a better understanding of their needs.
- Less personal worry

- Families had decreased feelings of guilt and helplessness
- A decrease in overall medical cost, less money spent on specialized medical treatments

After speaking to your family then it is suggested you follow these steps:

1. You can get a living will form and a durable power of attorney for health care from your health care provider. It is suggested that both forms be used. The Patient Self-Determination Act of 1990 requires all health care facilities such as hospitals and nursing homes that receive Medicare and Medicaid funding to provide written information about advanced directives upon admission
2. Review, complete, sign and date the forms. These forms are legal; however you do not need to hire a lawyer for them. Please be advised that state laws and the format of the forms can be different. Some states require notarization, others just require signature of witnesses.
3. Give copies to your family members and physicians. It is recommended that you bring a copy if you are admitted to a hospital.



Even with all the benefits stated before, an AHRQ study noted that about 75% of Americans do not have written directives for their loved ones. Also less than 50% of people with terminal illness had advanced directives.



Those statistics were sobering for me. I have made some tiny steps towards working on advanced directives in my family. I've had some conversations with my loved ones and now we know what our wishes are and we have some knowledge on how to make our wishes known to the health care providers. The next step is to complete the forms and give it to the health care providers. This way there will be no questions about the care me or my family want to receive if a health crisis occurs. I just realized that it's their decisions and I'm just their voice. The advanced directives will support those decisions.

The following websites might be helpful to review:

<http://estate.findlaw.com>

<http://www.helpstartshere.org> (click on seniors and aging)

Of course if you have more specific questions or concerns regarding advanced directives, please speak to your physician or lawyer.

Call Solutions EAP at 1-800-526-3485 for assistance for all of life's challenges. It's free, confidential and open to your family members. Check us out on-line at www.solutions-eap.com