**Advanced Care Planning**

Today when people are being admitted into a hospital, they are asked about their advanced care plans. This is far from the ideal time for examining end-of-life issues. In fact, the best time to make such decisions is **before** a medical crisis arises.

One way to express your wishes is with two standard documents: a Power of Attorney for Health Care and a Living Will. Knowing how each works may inspire you to complete these papers now – while you are well.

**Power of Attorney for Health Care:** You name someone who will make your health care decisions if ever you are unable to make them. This is different from a Power of Attorney for Property (which does not empower an agent to make decisions regarding health on your behalf). The best way to help your agent be able to represent your wishes is to talk candidly with this person about your preferences.

**Living Will:** This directs your physician and indicates your wishes about death-delaying procedures. It is not a Last Will and Testament and applies only when you have a terminal illness from which your doctor thinks you cannot recover.

You don't need to consult a lawyer to complete these documents. You may want counsel from your faith leader. Chaplains at all Advocate hospital sites have the forms and can answer questions, facilitate conversations, and help you complete them, too.

Talking may help you clarify your beliefs and feelings. Openly addressing these issues may lessen your fears. After all, being uncommunicative about death does not postpone it in any way. But having decisions made and a plan in place can be comforting to you and your loved ones.

**November Is Hospice Month.**

*Prayer:* Loving God, keep me mindful of loving kindnesses I can offer my loved ones as I age. Help me make the end of my life a time of comfort and peace for us all. Amen.

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**Your Advocate**

Meet Nancy Durbin

Durbin is Director of Nursing, Parish Nurse Ministry & Parish Nurse Network, at Advocate Health Care. She also serves on the Someone To Trust Coalition, an initiative to create a Chicago-wide advanced care planning program. Contact her at Nancy.Durbin@advocatehealthcare.com or 847-384-3749.

“Many people make advanced care planning decisions when they’re sick,” says Nancy Durbin, “but those decisions are best made when you’re well, when you can process information and make choices that truly reflect your wishes.”

Who you choose as the agent to carry out your wishes is important. “Your healthcare surrogate might be different from the person who handles your estate,” continues Durbin. “Select someone who will be your healthcare champion when you can’t speak for yourself, someone who won’t fall apart when things get really tough.”

“I have witnessed many family members forced to make decisions without knowing a patient’s wishes – guessing – which is torture,” warns Durbin. But with plans in place, a surrogate simply carries out choices already stated.

Ed Dubose, clinical ethics consultant to all Advocate sites and also on the Someone To Trust Coalition, adds, “Our obligation is to honor what the patient wants for his care, and advanced directives relieve the guilt many family members experience in a crisis. People get tied in knots when they want to do the right thing but are unsure what that is.”

Conversations about end-of-life issues should take place years upstream of crisis. “We plan our trips in advance, and this is the biggest and the last one we’ll take,” says Durbin. “As much as possible, it should be the trip we desire.”

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- Advocatehealthcare.com
- Fivewishes.org (Aging with Dignity – Five Wishes)
- Abanet.org/aging/toolkit (ABA Tool Kit for Health Advance Planning)
- Someoneotrust.org (Someone to Trust Coalition)

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