

## Advance Care Planning

Advance care planning helps you think about future health care choices. It is important that you receive care that aligns with your values and goals of care. Work with your doctor and your loved ones to identify and understand what is important to you.

The planning process helps you to consider and share your values, goals and wishes as they relate to your health care.

Advance care planning allows you to:

- Think about what is important to you.
- Share your values and goals with your loved ones and care team.
- Decide what types of treatment you would or would not want to receive.
- Choose who will make decisions about your medical care if you are unable to speak for yourself.
- Record your decisions in writing.

Making decisions may take time and you may not know all the answers. It is important that you talk about these topics with the people you trust. Ask for help and talk with your loved ones as well as your care team.

The following information is an overview of the advance care planning process. Ask your care team to learn more about advance care planning and for help accessing more resources.

### Thinking About Medical Decisions

The goal of advance care planning is to make sure you receive medical care that aligns with your wishes. An important step is to know your values and goals.

You may start by asking yourself:

- What is important to me?
- What does a good quality of life mean to me?
- What are my goals or values and how do they affect my wishes about health care?

Thinking through these questions may help you decide your wishes about:

- Use of life-sustaining treatments such as breathing support, eating and drinking support, dialysis, and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)
- Where you would like to receive care if you are dying. For example, would you like to be at home or in the hospital?

## **Advance Directives**

Advance directives are documents that record your wishes about future medical treatment.

Advance directives include:

- Medical Power of Attorney
- Medical Living Will (directive to physicians and family or surrogates)
- Out-of-Hospital Do-Not-Resuscitate (DNR) Order

### **Medical Power of Attorney**

This advance directive names someone to make decisions for you if you cannot speak for yourself. In the event that you cannot make decisions for yourself, this person will be able to make decisions for you.

The person you choose is also called your medical power of attorney.

Choosing a medical power of attorney may not be an easy choice, but it is important. It is especially important for individuals who are separated, not legally married, or have more than one adult child.

Choose someone who will honor, respect and follow your wishes. Your medical power of attorney should be someone who:

- You have spoken to about your wishes and is willing to speak on your behalf
- Is willing to act according to your wishes
- Can be there for you when you need them
- Understands what is important to you
- Is willing to ask important questions and understand the possible outcomes of medical decisions
- Is willing to talk with you about sensitive or difficult issues
- Can handle conflicting opinions between family, friends and medical providers

Talk about your goals of care, values and wishes with the person before you complete and sign any forms. Make sure you tell them if you change any of your wishes.

### **Living Will**

This advance directive is an outline of your health care wishes. It gives specific details about what treatment you do and do not want.

A living will takes effect only when you are in the terminal or irreversible phase of illness or injury.

A living will may address topics such as:

- Artificial nutrition and hydration, such as a feeding tube
- Dialysis (a process to clean the blood when the kidneys are not working)
- The use of a ventilator for breathing
- Comfort care

## **Out-of-Hospital Do-Not-Resuscitate (DNR) Order**

This is a medical order that tells the health care team not to perform CPR when the patient is outside the hospital. This is an order signed by a doctor. It is permanent unless the patient cancels the order.

If you do not have an Out-of-Hospital DNR order and your heart or lungs stop working, the health care team may do everything medically possible to restart your heart and help you breathe. Emergency personnel perform CPR unless an Out-of-Hospital DNR order is in effect.



**To show you have an Out-of-Hospital DNR order, you must have a copy of the DNR order, DNR bracelet or DNR necklace with you at all times.**

**Be sure to give a copy of your Out-of-Hospital DNR to your care team.**

Each state has different DNR forms and laws. **An Out-of-Hospital DNR will only be honored in the state it was filed in.** Ask your doctor about DNR orders for another state if your home is outside of Texas or you plan on traveling outside of Texas. Your social work counselor can also help you find answers about DNR orders in different states.

Talk with your doctor or social work counselor to obtain an Out-of-Hospital DNR order.

Patients with an Out-of-Hospital DNR order still need an In-Hospital DNR order if they are admitted to the hospital.

## **Tips to Remember**

- Give your medical power of attorney access to your advance directive documents.
- Give copies of your advance directive documents to all medical providers.
- You may update your documents as often as you wish. It can be helpful to review them from time to time. Talk about any changes with your support system and doctor. Be sure to update your advance directive forms to reflect any changes made.

Making plans for future health care decisions can give you peace of mind. It may reduce confusion or disagreement among loved ones. If your loved ones know your wishes, they will be able to honor them.

## **Additional Resources**

Learn more about advance care planning online at [www.MDAnderson.org/AdvanceCarePlanning](http://www.MDAnderson.org/AdvanceCarePlanning).

Ask your social work counselor for a copy of the Patient Education workbook, **Advance Care Planning**.

If you have questions, talk to your social work counselor or call Social Work at 713-792-6195.