

ADVANCE DIRECTIVES: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Advance care planning is the process of deciding one's future medical care. It helps ensure that, if you can't speak for yourself, your wishes will still be carried out. This information sheet is designed to help you understand the terminology and the process of creating Advance Directives – legal documents that state your health care wishes. It is important to discuss your preferences with your health care providers, family, close friends, clergy, and whomever you will rely on to speak for you when you cannot.

What are Advance Directives?

Advance Directives are legal documents in which you identify your choices for health care and medical treatment or name someone to make such choices for you if you become unable to communicate your wishes. They are for anyone of any age or health status.

What is a Power of Attorney for Health Care and when does it become effective?

A Power of Attorney for Health Care is one type of Advance Directive. It allows you to name another person to act as your agent and make medical decisions for you if you are unable to make them for yourself. Your agent's duty is to see that your wishes are followed.

What is a Living Will and when does it become effective?

A Living Will is another type of Advance Directive and is a written statement that describes the medical care you want or do not want. It becomes effective only when you are unable to make or communicate your own health care choices.

What is the difference between a Power of Attorney for Health Care and a Living Will?

A Power of Attorney for Health Care designates an agent to make health care decisions for you. A Living Will provides specific instructions about treatments desired or not desired. Both documents come into effect at any point in your health care when you are unable to make or communicate your own decisions.

Is it important to complete both a Power of Attorney for Health Care and a Living Will?

Completing one or both Advance Directives is your decision. If you only complete one document, generally, we suggest the Power of Attorney for Health Care. Then your Power of Attorney agent can represent you regarding your choices, including decisions that would have been stated in your Living Will. The most important thing is to have conversations with your agent and loved ones so they are aware of your wishes.

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What is a DNR and when does it become effective?

A DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) or “No Code” is a medical order that must be written at the patient’s or agent’s request at every admission to a medical facility, regardless of the condition of the patient. A Living Will or a Power of Attorney for Health Care is not the same as a DNR.

May I use other legal documents as Advance Directives?

No. Other legal documents are important, but are not specific to health care decisions. A Last Will and Testament is not the same as a Living Will. A Power of Attorney for financial decisions is not the same as a Power of Attorney for Health Care. Therefore, it is important to write documents specific to your health care choices.

Do Advance Directives have to be witnessed?

Yes. The signing of these documents must be witnessed by a notary public or two persons who are not relatives or health care providers.

What should I do with these documents?

It is your responsibility to provide copies of your Advance Directive documents to your physician, local hospital, other regular health care providers, and your agent (the person you have chosen to make medical decisions if you have executed a Power of Attorney for Health Care). You should also give copies to close relatives and friends and discuss your choices with them and your agent. Put your original in a safe, but accessible, place.

Can I change my mind after I write an Advance Directive?

Yes. You may change or revoke an Advance Directive at any time through verbal or written communication. It is important to notify family members, health care providers, hospital, or home health agencies if you change or revoke your Advance Directives and provide these individuals with copies of the new documents.

Will an Advance Directive from one state be honored in a different state?

Most states will honor valid Advance Directives from other states, but you should check if you plan to spend time in another state since there are some exceptions and documents vary by state.

Must a health care provider follow an Advance Directive?

Yes. Your health care provider will follow your Advance Directives within the limits of the law and hospital policy.

Must I have an Advance Directive?

No. It is entirely up to you. If you do not have an Advance Directive and become unable to make or communicate your own health care decisions, your Next of Kin will make such decisions for you in consultation with your health care provider. Advance Directives, however, give you greater assurance that your wishes will be honored.

Who at Methodist Health System can answer my questions or help write a Power of Attorney for Health Care or Living Will?

If you are a patient at Methodist Hospital or Methodist Women’s Hospital, please ask your nurse and s/he will contact a chaplain or administrative coordinator to answer your questions, provide the necessary forms for you, and notarize your document(s).

Or you may call the Methodist Pastoral Services Department (402) 354-4016 with any questions or to make an appointment. One of our chaplains will be happy to assist you with the forms and notarization.

Please also feel free to make an appointment to discuss and complete your Advance Directives with your health coach or health care provider at your Methodist Physicians Clinic.

This material is for informational purposes only. For specific legal or medical advice, contact your attorney or health care provider.