

Planning Ahead



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Advance Health Care Directive

We are all doing our part – wearing our masks, keeping safe distance and staying home. We also need to be prepared for serious illness which may still occur. Now is the time to make your Advance Health Care Directive (AHCD). An AHCD puts in writing your wishes for health care treatment and names one or more people as your “agent” to make decisions and direct your health care if you are not able to speak for yourself. COVID-19 comes to mind but it could be an accident or other serious illness that renders us unable to direct medical care for ourselves.

We are uncomfortable thinking about our own mortality. And yet, by having the conversation, talking to our family and most importantly the person we want to serve as our health care agent, it can reduce anxiety for ourselves and reduce stress for our family should they ever have to make medical care decisions for us. Topics for discussion could include whether and under what circumstances you would want to refuse aggressive treatment such as intubation and life support, and whether you would want to be resuscitated in the event of a medical emergency. If there are treatment options, what are the factors, such as quality of life issues, you would want your agent to consider? How do you feel about organ donation?

Then, most importantly, put your wishes in writing. You don’t need an attorney to do this. There are many AHCD forms easy to find on the internet. You can look at the website of your local hospital, your health care insurer, or your medical group. Some forms are very simple and general. Other forms allow you to express your wishes in great detail. You can have your signature notarized or ask two people to be your witnesses. Make multiple copies of the signed AHCD to give to your doctor, your agent and your lawyer if you have one. Keep a copy at home where it can be easily found.

Making your AHCD is the ultimate in self-care and an invaluable gift to our families, doctors and medical team. And, in this time of anxiety, planning for worst case puts you back in control.

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