

ADVANCED DIRECTIVES: LEGAL DOCUMENTS FOR END-OF-LIFE



After conversations with your loved ones about end-of-life decisions, there needs to be legal documents outlining your choices and who has permission to act in your behalf.

An Advance Directive for Healthcare provides guidance for treatment or non-treatment-

including artificial life support, feeding tubes, and other technologies to sustain life.

The Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare authorizes someone to be the Health Care Agent for another person, to make healthcare decisions, if that person is incapacitated. Laws vary by state and by country so consult an attorney, physician, hospital staff or social worker for specific guidelines to follow.

Questions to consider:

- ❖ *Where do you want to be when you die; hospital, home, or another place?*
- ❖ *Do you want privacy and quiet or would you prefer the company of loved ones and friends?*
- ❖ *If you could no longer swallow, would you want to have a feeding tube?*
- ❖ *Under what circumstances would you choose to continue or begin treatments that may prolong your life?*
- ❖ *Are there circumstances under which you would refuse or discontinue treatment?*
- ❖ *Do you prefer burial or cremation?*

Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 – To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven. A time to be born, and a time to die....

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ADVOCACY AND END-OF-LIFE

Advocacy is an important part of health ministry, especially in expressing care and encouraging people as they make end-of-life decisions.

These sensitive and delicate conversations are difficult but important for every adult. Conversations and open dialogue about preferences and wishes alleviate uncertainty when individuals are physically or mentally unable to express their desires. Family or loved ones do not have to guess or wonder what the ill or dying person would want.

Sometimes it may be helpful to have a facilitator, a health minister, assist with getting conversations started. Some questions that encourage family talks focus on:

- ❖ *With whom do you want to talk about end-of-life issues?*
- ❖ *What do you most want them to know?*
- ❖ *When and where will you have this “conversation”?*
- ❖ *What beliefs do you hold that influence your thoughts about life and about dying?*
- ❖ *What concerns do you have about your health or your future healthcare?*
- ❖ *What are your fears regarding your health and the end of your life?*
- ❖ *If you wrote your own epitaph, what would it say?*

Personal relationships, spiritual and religious values, financial, and legal questions also need to be considered.

If you are a person who feels called to have this conversation with someone, resources are available. As an organization, Health Ministries Association offers support for health ministers facilitating such conversations.

Excellent resources can be accessed such as Caring Conversations workbook at www.PracticalBioEthics.org or the Five Wishes publication at www.AgingWithDignity.org 1-888-5-WISHES.

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