

It's About Your Priorities

Before you sit down to discuss your care wishes with a family member or friend, you need to figure them out for yourself. That means thinking about some things that are not easy to consider. For example: the possibility of being seriously ill; having to depend on others; and, hardest of all, the fact that someday you are going to die.

Thinking about how you would like decisions made for you as death approaches can help you feel more in charge.

It's About Communication

The next step is to talk over your wishes with a close relative or friend, especially the person you choose as your health care agent.

Here are five quick tips:

1. Be a good listener. Ask the other person to be a good listener too.
2. Remember, when it comes to your health care, it's your values and goals that matter the most.
3. Take your time. Some people can say how they feel all at once, while for others it takes time. Go at your own pace.
4. Act now. Situations can change quickly, so these topics are better addressed sooner rather than later.
5. Give your loved ones up-to-date information. If you have changed your views, it's time for another conversation.

You are not alone. At Hospice of Northeastern Illinois, there are resources available to help. Social workers, chaplains, hospice care nurses and medical directors, and bereavement counselors can provide the support you need to make this important life choice.



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HOSPICE
of Northeastern Illinois

Advance Directives

ADVANCE DIRECTIVES

A GUIDE TO:

- *Your Health Care Choices*
- *Your Advance Directive Options*
- *Discussing Your Wishes*

It's About Life

Making informed decisions about your health care can take a little effort on your part. Taking control of your own care means:

- getting the facts and making your own decisions, for as long as you are able
- deciding who you would want to decide for you, if the time ever comes when you can't speak for yourself
- saying which types of care you would or would not want, if you were near the end of your life.

Deciding to complete an advance directive is a personal choice. Health care providers want you to know what your options are, but the responsibility of deciding how best to plan your future care is up to you.

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It's Your Decision

The law puts you in charge of your own care and it is your right to give or refuse informed consent to treatment. You have the right to know about your options first — and then make an informed decision that is right for you. Being “informed” means your doctor or other health care provider helps you understand:

- your medical condition (what's wrong and what the outlook is)
- what treatment your doctor recommends, and why
- what other options are available
- what the risks and benefits are for each option.

Your Living Will

If you are 18 or older, you have the right to complete a *Living Will*, also known as a *Declaration*. A *Living Will* is a document that allows you to give instructions pertaining to the types of treatment you do or do not wish to receive if you become terminally ill.

Your *Living Will* must be signed by you. If you are unable to sign, you may have someone else sign on your behalf. Two adult witnesses must also sign your *Living Will*. Your witnesses should not be:

- anyone who signs your name for you;
- anyone who will inherit from you
- anyone who is financially responsible for your care

It is important to let your doctor know that you have signed a *Living Will* and give him/her a copy.

Safeguards

Illinois' Living Will Act does not affect the responsibility of your doctor or other health care providers to offer treatment for pain management or comfort care. Additionally, if death would result from the lack of nutrition (food) or hydration (water), rather than the terminal condition, nutrition and hydration cannot be withdrawn or withheld.

Power of Attorney for Health Care

You have the right to appoint a health care agent or representative to make personal care and health care decisions for you in the event you lose the ability to make them yourself. This is called a Power of Attorney for Health Care. This document states your wishes for end-of-life care to guide your agent in making decisions.

The person you choose to be your agent should be someone you know and trust, however, you can not name your doctor or any other health care provider who is caring for you. You do have the option of designating an alternate or back-up agent. This person would become your agent if the first person you name is unable to serve. If you select your spouse to be your

agent, he or she will become disqualified if your marriage is later dissolved. It is important to give a copy of this document to your doctor and other health care providers.

Do Not Resuscitate Orders

A *Do Not Resuscitate* (DNR) order is a doctor's order that tells medical personnel that if a patient suffer a cardiopulmonary attack (heart attack), the patient does not wish to be revived. Most medical facilities require that cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) be started unless there is an order not to. A DNR order is a complement to the other Advance Directives discussed here, but is not a substitute for these.

Changing Your Mind

You may cancel either of these documents at any time, regardless of your mental or physical condition, by:

- expressing in some other clear way your intent to revoke in the presence of an adult witness, who signs and dates a statement confirming your action
- dating and signing a written statement saying you revoke the document
- destroying the document

What Happens If I Choose Not to Have Advance Directives

If you have not completed an Advance Directive, decisions regarding your health care will have to be made by someone else (who might not be the person you would have selected) and this could place additional burdens on your family or physician.

If you are unable to make decisions, a health care surrogate may be chosen to make health care decisions for you. The surrogate who would act in such a case would be (in order of priority): guardian of the person; spouse; any adult child; either parent; adult brother or sister or adult grandchildren; a close friend, or guardian of the estate. Under some circumstances, legal action may be required to have decisions made on your behalf.

It's About Values and Life Goals

Studies show that an Advance Directive, by itself, may not answer every question that could come up and it does not explain your particular values and goals.

If something were to happen to you, your care would depend on your health care representative, your doctor, and your family. The more they know about your values and life goals, the better job they can do if the need ever arises. If you have a new Advance Directive or values statement, be sure to give your doctor a copy.