

Advance Directives

If you are unable to speak for yourself, advance directives are helpful legal documents. They allow you to tell doctors and health care workers about the type of medical treatment you would want when faced with a serious illness or unexpected accident.

It is important to let your health care team know if you have advance directives, so they are aware of them and can honor your health care choices.

Here are answers to some common questions about advance directives.

What is an Advance Directive?

An advance directive tells your doctors and other health care workers what types of care you would like to have if you become unable to make medical decisions.

In the United States, there are forms you can fill out to tell health care workers about the care you want. These forms are called:

- a Health Care Power of Attorney (POA)
- a Declaration of Mental Health Treatment
- a Living Will
- a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) Order

What is a Health Care Power of Attorney?

This form allows you choose someone you trust to make health decisions if you are unable to do so yourself. This person can be a spouse or partner, parent, friend, or someone you trust to make health decisions for you. The doctor shares information with the person you choose, but the doctor cannot be the representative.

What about a Declaration of Mental Health Treatment?

Mental health is your ability to understand information and use judgment to think clearly when making decisions. If you are not able to think clearly to make health decisions, you can choose a person to help you.

There are many reasons why this form may be needed, such as being very ill or taking medicines that affect your thinking ability.

What is a Living Will?

A living will is a form that tells the type of medical treatment you want in certain situations. It only comes into effect if you are terminally ill or permanently unconscious, such as in a coma. In a living will, you can tell health care providers about the type of help you want, such as machines to help you breathe or feeding tubes if you cannot eat normally.

What is a DNR order?

A do not resuscitate (DNR) order is another type of advance directive. It allows you to not to have cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) or other treatment to try to revive you if your heart stops or if you stop breathing.

When I fill out these forms who do I give Advance Directive papers to?

Give a copy of these forms to your doctor. Give one to the person or people who will represent you. Tell health care providers and caregivers that you have an advance directive. It is also a good idea to have a copy with you if you need to go to the hospital for surgery or treatment.

How can I make or change my Advance Directive?

You can change or make a new advance directive at any time. Simply destroy the old one and complete a new form. If you have questions or wish to put your choices in writing, tell your doctor or health care provider.