

Do you need help?

It may be difficult to talk about your advance directive. You may want some direction on how to complete a durable power of attorney for health care. Geisinger staff wants to help you.

To talk to someone about preparing an advance directive and making your healthcare choices known, please call us.

Geisinger Medical Center, Danville

- Pastoral Care 271-3700
- Patient Representative 271-8881
- Social Work 271-6263
- Ethics Committee 271-6389

Geisinger Wyoming Valley, Wilkes-Barre

- Social Work 826-7398



What
you need
to know
*to make decisions
about your health care*

Advance Directives



What you need to know about advance directives

It may be a car accident, a heart attack or a fall from a ladder. You don't expect tragedy to happen, so you don't plan for it. But as unpleasant as planning is, the consequences of not planning can be far worse.

Just as you have feelings about the way you want to live, you probably have feelings about how you want your life to end. Before the time comes when you cannot make or communicate your treatment decisions, talk to your family about the choices you would make and how comfortable they would feel with those choices. Then talk to your physician. Once you have made decisions about your medical treatment at the end of your life, write them down.

The conversations you have with your family and doctor are called advance planning. The decision you make is called an advance directive.

This brochure answers your questions about advance directives.

What is an advance directive?

An advance directive helps assure your personal wishes about medical treatment are carried out should you become so ill that you are unable to communicate.

What kinds of decisions do I make?

You can make decisions about what measures you want your physician to take to prolong your life or keep you comfortable.

- If you fear being kept alive by machines for an indefinite period of time, you may direct your doctor that you do not want to be kept alive by artificial or mechanical means. This is sometimes called *withholding treatment*.
- If you are near death you may tell your doctor that you have reached the point when you don't want to be kept alive by machines any longer. This is sometimes called *withdrawing treatment*.

If you fail to talk about your choices, the burden for decision making shifts to family members, doctors or the courts who may not know or share your values.

Where do I start?

You start by talking. Discuss your wishes with family and friends, as well as with your doctor. Be open about your fears and concerns, and feel free to ask your doctor questions about things that confuse you. The more you talk to your doctor and the people close to you, the easier it will be for them to carry out your wishes. Then, you can state your wishes in writing. You can choose one of three ways to do that:

- Ask your physician to write your instructions into your medical record, including the name of the relative or friend you've asked to act on your behalf.
- Write a durable power of attorney for health care.
- Make a living will.

A durable power of attorney for health care authorizes a person of your choice (commonly called a *surrogate*) to make decisions on your behalf. This document, which offers your surrogate and doctor the greatest opportunity for interpreting your decisions, becomes effective when you are unable to make decisions.

When do advance directives apply?

An advance directive applies when you are near death, in a coma, or otherwise unable to communicate your wishes.

I'm not a doctor. How can I know enough to make these decisions?

You don't have to be a doctor to write an advance directive. That's because an advance directive is a personal decision based on medical information provided by your doctor.

Will my doctor help me?

Of course. If you have a serious illness, your doctor will discuss your chance for recovery and then will recommend a course of care. He or she will help you understand how well the treatments are likely to work, what the side effects of the treatments will be and the possible consequences if you refuse any treatment. Your doctor will talk to you about the treatment options that offer an opportunity for recovery or those options that will make you more comfortable while you are ill.

What if I change my mind?

That's O.K. An advance directive is really nothing more than instructions. If you change your mind for any reason, talk about your new decision with your family, friends and doctor and then change your instructions. It's that simple.

What if I have more questions?

Start by asking your doctor. He or she knows your medical history and can talk to you about your treatment choices. Remember, you can talk to close friends, your family and your priest, minister or rabbi if you have any trouble making this personal decision.