

## ADVANCE MEDICAL DIRECTIVES – GENERAL INFORMATION

*This paper provides general information about Advance Directives but does not take the place of legal counsel. This information is not intended as a substitute for the expertise and judgment of qualified health-care professionals. You should consult with your health-care provider about all health-care issues.*

1. **What are Advance Medical Directives?** They are legal documents that allow you to give directions for your future medical care.
  - A. It is your right to accept or refuse medical care. Advance Directives help protect this right. They help make your choices known if you become physically or mentally unable to do so yourself.
  - B. Advance Directives are valuable tools. They can help your family, by freeing them of the responsibility and stress of having to make difficult decisions for you, and they can help your health-care providers by giving directions for your care.
  
2. **As a patient you have the right to:**
  - A. *Privacy:* personal and medical information is not to be made public
  - B. *Information about your condition:* your health-care providers must tell you about your condition, treatments and chances for recovery.
  - C. *Informed consent:* your health-care providers must clearly explain any procedures, tests, etc., and their benefits and risks. You must give permission for any such procedures or tests. You have the right to refuse any treatment.
  - D. *Information about Advance Directives:* Advance Directives and your rights as a patient must be explained in writing when you are admitted (in most cases).
  
3. **Advance Directives help protect your rights.** They can ‘speak’ for you when you can’t make your wishes known due to coma or other unconscious states, brain damage or terminal illness (when death is expected within a short time.)
  
4. **There are two types of Advance Directives:**
  - A. *Living Wills:* these written instructions explain your wishes for health care if you can’t communicate as a result of a terminal condition or irreversible coma.
  - B. *Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care:* this is sometimes called a ‘health-care proxy’. It is a document that lets you name a person (your proxy) to make medical decisions for you if you become unable to do so.
  - C. You can have both types if you wish.
  
5. **Consider your values before creating Advance Directives.** Imagine yourself near death.
  - A. If you were in a coma (or other unconscious condition), or if you had permanent brain damage or a terminal illness, what would you want to do? (ex: have others honor your decisions to die without pain and suffering, prolong life regardless of chances for recovery, have your religious beliefs respected, etc.)

- B. Discuss your thoughts and feelings with family and friends, your health care providers, anyone you might name as a proxy, your lawyer and clergy.

**6. How to create Advance Directives:**

- A. Check California State laws regarding living wills and durable powers of attorney for health-care (health care proxies)
- B. Put your wishes in writing and be as detailed as possible.
- C. Sign and date your advance directives, or have them notarized if necessary.
- D. Give a copy to all of your health-care providers for your medical records.
- E. Give a copy to your health-care proxies so they can follow your wishes.
- F. Keep a card in your wallet stating that you have advance directives and where to find them.
- G. Discuss your advance directives with family, friends, health-care providers and your proxy. Give copies to anyone who should be notified in an emergency.
- H. Review your advance directives regularly. You can always change or even cancel advance directives. Make sure to update copies you've given out when you make any revisions.

**7. Questions and answers:**

- A. *What is a 'do not resuscitate' (DNR) order?* It is a set of written instructions from a physician telling health-care providers not to perform CPR or related procedures. Advance directives do not replace DNR orders.
- B. *What if I don't have advance directives?* Not having advance directives can put more stress on your family and your health-care providers. They will be responsible for making important decisions about your care without knowing your wishes.
- C. *Where can I get more information?* Help and information are available from many sources: hospitals, hospices, home health care agencies, long term care facilities; your physician or lawyer;  
California Healthcare Association  
[www.calhealth.org/download/advanced%20directive%20for%20web.pdf](http://www.calhealth.org/download/advanced%20directive%20for%20web.pdf);  
California Office of Attorney General  
[www.ag.ca.gov/consumers/general/adv\\_hc\\_dir.php](http://www.ag.ca.gov/consumers/general/adv_hc_dir.php);  
National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization  
[www.caringinfo.org/advancedirectives](http://www.caringinfo.org/advancedirectives) 1-800-658-8898