Where do Advance Directives Fit in?

Randi Belisomo
Mary Mulcahy, M.D.
November 16, 2013
Providing the information you need to make life's toughest decisions

www.lifemattersmedia.org
Advance care planning

• Learning about the types of decisions that might need to be made
• Considering those decisions ahead of time
• Letting others know about your preferences, often by putting them into an advance directive
What is an advance directive?

• An advance directive is a legal document that goes into effect only if you are incapacitated and unable to speak for yourself.

• This could be the result of disease or severe injury—no matter how old you are. It helps others know what type of medical care you want.

• It also allows you to express your values and desires related to end-of-life care. You might think of an advance directive as a living document—one that you can adjust as your situation changes because of new information or a change in your health.
Elements of an advance directive

• There are two elements in an advance directive—a living will and a durable power of attorney for health care.

• There are also other documents that can supplement your advance directive or stand alone. You can choose which documents to create, depending on how you want decisions to be made. These documents include:
  – DNR (do not resuscitate) orders
  – Organ and tissue donation
  – Dialysis
  – Blood transfusions
  – Pacemaker/AICD
  – POLST
Key people should know:

• Give copies to your healthcare proxy and alternate proxy.
• Give your doctor a copy for your medical records.
• Tell key family members and friends where you keep a copy.
• If you have to go to the hospital, give staff there a copy to include in your records.
• Because you might change your advance directive in the future, it’s a good idea to keep track of who receives a copy.
Upkeep of your advance directive:

• Review your advance care planning decisions from time to time—for example, every 10 years, if not more often.
• You might want to revise your preferences for care if your situation or your health changes.
• You might want to make adjustments if you receive a serious diagnosis; if you get married, separated, or divorced; if your spouse dies; or if something happens to your proxy or alternate.
• If your preferences change, you will want to make sure your doctor, proxy, and family know about them.
What happens if you have no advance directive?

• The state where you live will assign someone to make medical decisions on your behalf. This will probably be your spouse, your parents if they are available, or your children if they are adults. If you have no family members, the state will choose someone to represent your best interests.

• Remember, an advance directive will only be used to make healthcare decisions if you are in danger of dying and cannot make your wishes known.
Resources

www.lifemattersmedia.org

www.cecc.info

www.agingwithdignity.org

www.idph.state.il.us/public/books/advin.htm

www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/advance-care-planning
Providing the information you need to make life's toughest decisions

www.lifemattersmedia.org