



Medical Notes

Advanced Directive

Article provided by Health Cost Management

Most of the time we publish articles that contain medical topics of interest to our clients' business life. In this case, we've chosen a topic in the medical field that covers an important issue for everyone to consider in their personal life.

An **Advanced Directive** is a document that tells your doctor and family what kind of medical care you would want (or would not want) if you become terminally ill and cannot speak for yourself. An advanced directive takes effect only if you cannot express your wishes; for example, if you are in a coma.

A **Living Will**, one type of advanced directive. This document informs healthcare providers what kind of treatment you would want (or refuse to have) if you were dying and unable to speak for yourself, or if you were becoming permanently unconscious. For example, you may state that you would not want to be kept alive on a breathing machine if you were unconscious with no hope of recovery.

A Living Will does not prevent you from getting medical care if you are sick or injured. It simply informs healthcare providers about what kind of care you would want if you were dying and could not speak for yourself. You can cancel or change the instructions at any time.

A **Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare**, also called a Healthcare Proxy or Surrogate, is another type of advanced directive. It is used to name someone you can trust to make healthcare decisions for you if you cannot speak for yourself. Like a Living Will, it takes effect only if you cannot make medical decisions for yourself. The person you name must be at least 18 years old and usually cannot be your doctor or other healthcare provider.

What Type of Advanced Directive Do I Need?

The American Bar Association (ABA) recommends that you have both a Living Will and a Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare. Although a Living Will is more detailed, it may not cover a medical situation you experience in the future. In that case, having a Durable Power of Attorney lets the trusted relative or friend make decisions about a situation or treatment not covered in your Living Will.

Living Wills and Durable Powers of Attorney for Healthcare are for everyone, not just older adults. A sudden illness or an accident can happen to anyone at any time.

How Can I Prepare an Advanced Directive?

The best time to prepare any Advanced Directive is when you are feeling well. Discuss your wishes with your family and with anyone you need to make decisions for you, so they will know what you would want if you become seriously ill. It is important to be sure that the person you name in your Durable Power of Attorney is willing and able to make the decisions that you are asking of them.

Your healthcare provider or local hospital can provide you with the forms to fill out. If you are admitted to a hospital, you will be asked if you have an Advanced Directive; if you do not, the hospital can give you the forms you want. For forms and an ABA tool kit, see the selected websites at the end of this article.

You do not need a lawyer to write your Advanced Directive, but you may want one to help you. Follow legal requirements (outlined on the form) for preparing valid documents

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and make sure you put the date on your document. Usually, you will need two people to witness your signature; some states also require you to have your signature notarized. Make several copies of your Advanced Directive. Keep one for yourself and give others to your doctors, lawyer, family members, and

friends. Take copies of these documents if you are being admitted to a hospital or nursing home. If your wishes change, write new documents and destroy the old ones. ❖

Visit these websites: American Bar Association's consumer's toolkit for healthcare advanced planning: www.abanet.org/aging/toolkit/home.html. Forms for all 50 states, also provides a service to register your Advanced Directive: www.uslivingwillregistry.com/forms.shtml