

What is an Advanced Directive?

We all are accustomed to making decisions about our personal health care when we visit the doctor. We tell the doctor about our medical problems; the doctor listens, they may have us undergo some tests, and then makes a diagnosis. The doctor then goes over what medical treatments can be undertaken and **we** make the decision (or at least agree with the doctor) as to how the condition will be treated. We more or less take this interaction with the doctor for granted. That is always how it has been and we'd like to think that is how it will always be...

But, what if there comes a day that you can not communicate your wishes due to the illness or a serious injury? Who will make these health decisions for you? If you had made your wishes known to loved ones, will they be followed?

...These are all sobering questions.

Through the use of **advanced directives** you can communicate decisions you've made about the treatments you want to undertake to your health care providers in the event you can't do so for yourself.

Advanced directives are spoken and written instructions to your family and physician about how you want your medical care handled in the event you become unable to make such decisions at the time needed. This is a way to manage your future when you are unable to do so. In an advanced directive, you may name a person of your choice who can make health care decisions for you in the event you can not.

Advanced directives are not required, but are encouraged by physicians and health care facilities. This is to ensure that your wishes will be followed concerning your future health care. In the event you become incapacitated and do not have an advanced directive your doctor must rely on someone who can make these health decisions for you.

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Under Indiana law, this will be an immediate family member; a spouse, parent, adult child, brother or sister.

There are different types of Advance Directives that are recognized in Indiana.

- Direct discussion with your physician and family about your health care;
- Organ and tissue donation;
- Health care representative;
- Living Will Declaration;
- Psychiatric advanced directive;
- Out of hospital Do Not Resuscitate Declaration;
- Power of Attorney;

I will attempt to address them briefly.

When you talk with your family and physician, remember that a verbal instruction with no written evidence carries less weight should there be a family disagreement over what should be done. If you have written instructions it is important that your family and physician have a copy. It can then be put into your medical chart. So if you are admitted to the hospital, then your doctor can write orders according to your wishes.

When speaking of organ and tissue donation it is important to recognize that it is the ultimate gift for someone in need. You can make your wishes known on your driver's license or making it your choice on a living will, or other document. You should make your family aware of such, so they know your wishes and can work to ensure they are followed.

In choosing a health care representative, you must do so in writing. You must fill out an appointment of health care representative document that names the individual you

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choose. This person will be able to make your health care decisions for you when you cannot.

A living will is a document that puts into words your wishes in the event you cannot communicate. It includes listing specifics about CPR, artificial nutrition, maintenance on a respirator, and blood transfusions. You can have a living will that states that life prolonging needs are not to be made under certain circumstances or you can have a life-prolonging declaration that states that you want all available life prolonging medical treatments to sustain life.

A psychiatric advanced directive can be made whenever a person lacks legal capacity. It sets the care and treatment options to be made by a chosen person during your period of mental incapacity. One can refer to Indiana Code 16-36-1.7 for further requirements of this directive.

If you do not want CPR, your physician can write a “do not resuscitate” order in your medical file. Should you be at home when an emergency occurs and need CPR, you have the option of an “Out of the Hospital Do Not Resuscitate Declaration and Order.” This allows a qualified person, to decide if CPR, in the event your heart and lungs have quit working, should be performed. This should be discussed with your physician.

The last directive is the power of attorney. This is a declaration that grants another person to have say-so over your affairs. It can cover financial, health care or both. This person should be someone you can trust. This document must:

- Name of the person you want to take charge
- List the situations and powers you give this person to take charge of;
- List the powers and situations that you do not give charge of;

And this document must be in writing and notarized to be binding.

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All these directives can be used separately or all together. An attorney is not required but may be recommended because the laws are complex and you then have the chance to clarify questions pertaining to the state, since we live in a tri-state area and often times undertake medical treatment in neighboring Ohio or Kentucky. Remember, you can change your directive at any time.

It is comforting to know that if you want control over your future health care, it is attainable. It is important that your family and physician know your wishes. If you are interested in information about writing advanced directives, contact the social service office at Dearborn County Hospital for further assistance. They have booklets that can provide you the information you need in developing your own advanced directive.

If you would like further explanation of advanced directives, visit Indiana State Department of Health and search under Advance Directives. As always, if you have any questions or comments, eMail me at gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov