



WHAT IS ADVANCE CARE PLANNING?

Advance care planning – making and writing down decisions about future medical care – should be a routine part of medical care for every adult. It is a process of thinking about your choices, writing them down, and talking with others about them. You do not need a lawyer to complete an Advance Directive, but there are several things to consider when planning.

1. Understand your choices:

You have the legal right to make choices about your medical treatment and change your mind about your advance care decisions and plan at any time. It is important for anyone, 18 years of age or older, to name a surrogate decision maker in case of emergency. This is the person who can speak for you if you cannot speak for yourself. In Virginia, if you do not have an advance directive, a decision maker will be identified in this order: legally appointed guardian, spouse (if no divorce filed), adult children, parent, adult brother or sister, and then another relative.

An **Advance Directive** includes:

Agent for Health Care Decisions

- You appoint an "agent" who will have specific powers for medical decision making. This person should be willing to act as you would if you could.
- Is valid only if you are unable to communicate for yourself.
- Assumes decisions will be made based on your goals and values.

Living Will

- You can state preferences for care if you are expected to die soon (terminal condition)
- Limits aggressive, curative care and requests palliative or comfort care

Organ Donation – Identifies your wish to donate organs or tissues at the time of death. You can sign and keep a card to alert your family and medical providers that you wish to donate. Organs that can be transplanted include: heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, pancreas, small intestine. Tissues include cornea, bone, skin, cartilage, ligaments, veins, and heart valves.

2. Think about your medical condition, your treatment choices, your life values and goals, and experiences of family and friends:

Begin by considering which statement is most true for you:

- I want to live as long as possible, regardless of the quality of life I have.
- I want to keep a good quality of life, even if it means I may not live as long.

Think about your relationships and life:

- What, if any, unfinished personal or legal business am I worried about?
- What activities in life give me enjoyment and satisfaction?
- How do my religious beliefs affect my attitude toward serious illness?
- What are my experiences and beliefs about life sustaining treatments (there are pros and cons for each treatment choice) including:

Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)

Being on a Ventilator (machine that helps or controls breathing)

Intravenous (IV) medicines or fluids
Feeding tubes through the nose or directly into the stomach
Kidney dialysis Autopsy Organ Donation

- What else is important to me about life, death, religion, relationships?

3. Talk with the person you have chosen as your agent and with your family, friends, doctors, spiritual leaders about your wishes:

Be sure everyone understands and supports your decisions. Your agent will be given specific decision-making powers about health care (not finances) and must be someone who: knows your values and wishes, will make decisions in the way you would have if you were able, and is able to function in difficult decisions and advocate for you.

Ask your Doctor –

- Will you talk openly with me and my family about any illnesses or injuries and prognosis?
- What will you do if I have pain or other symptoms?
- If I get too sick to speak for myself, how will you make decisions?

Ask your Family – If I become very ill or hurt:

- Will you respect my wants and needs, even if you don't agree with what I have said I want?
- Will you take care of yourself so you don't get sick?
- Will you advocate for me and ask questions so that you understand all possible choices?

4. Complete the Advance Directive form inside “Your Right to Decide”:

The booklet can answer your basic questions but remember:

- The Advance Directive will be followed only if you are too ill to tell us what you want.
- You can attach a letter or other documents to explain your wishes to your family in more detail.
- You must sign and date the form in the presence of two witnesses (any person over age 18).
- Copies should be provided to your agent, other appropriate family members, your doctors, etc.
- When you provide a copy to the hospital, it will be entered into the computer system so it is available to your health care providers.
- Cut out the wallet card and put with your insurance card in your wallet.
- Bring a copy to a hospital or nursing home stay.
- Your wishes can be changed or revoked at any time.
- You should review your wishes and possibly change your Advance Directive:
 - every year or so,
 - if your health or the availability of your agent changes,
 - if you are about to have an operation or procedure.

5. If you want more information or help:

Virginia Advance Directive form: www.uvahealth.com or ask for a copy at the Admissions Office.

Forms and information for each state: www.caringinfo.org or 1-800/658.8898

Durable DNR: www.vdh.state.va.us/oems or 1-800-523-6019

Organ Donation: www.lifenet.org or 1-800-847-7831

Values History: www.agingwithdignity.org or 1-888-594-7437

Palliative Care (physical and psychological comfort) and Hospice: www.nhpco.org or 800/658-8898

Lawyer's toolkit to organize all documents:

<http://www.abanet.org/aging/publications/docs/HealthFinancial2004.pdf>

Notes or Questions to ask your Health Care Provider or Lawyer: