

Faculty and Employee Assistance Program Newsletter

Advance Directives: What Everyone Needs to Know...and Take Action On

Submitted by: Brenda Wilson, LCSW, CEAP, Geriatric Care Manager
Faculty and Employee Assistance Program

Recent media attention about the Terri Schiavo case has caused millions of Americans to reflect on their own health and end of life preferences. And, the questions of how one wants to live, or die, or be cared for are very important to consider now, while we can. It is also a territory that most people don't want to think about. Let's explore the basics of Advance Directives a bit further:

Advance Directives are legal documents written in advance of an incapacitating illness or injury that outline your instructions regarding your medical care preferences. If you become incapacitated and unable to communicate your care preferences, your family, friends and medical professionals can turn to those directives for guidance. If you have not communicated your preferences to others in advance of the need, the situation becomes much more complicated and may not align with your values. There are two types of Advance Directives:



- **Living Will:** This document outlines the types of medical treatment and life-sustaining measures you do and do not want used if unable to communicate for yourself. Examples are mechanical respiration such as a ventilator, tube feeding, dialysis, and hydration.
- **Medical Power of Attorney:** also called a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care, a Health Care Agent or a Health Care Proxy, is your legal designation of who you want to have make medical and health care decisions for you if you are unable to do so yourself. This is separate from a financial Power of Attorney and is specific to medical and health care decisions.

Discussing different end of life situations:

Health care is a very complicated process involving much more than a decision to "keep me alive no matter what" or "I don't want to be kept alive on tubes." Some situations and treatments to consider and discuss with your loved ones include:

- **Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR):** a group of procedures performed on a person whose heart has stopped beating or someone who stops breathing.
- **Mechanical ventilation:** a machine is used to support or replace the function of the lungs. A ventilator forces air into the lungs through a tube inserted in the mouth or throat.
- **Artificial nutrition and hydration:** tube feeding which can be used to supplement or replace ordinary eating and drinking.

- **Kidney Dialysis:** a machine process to filter waste and toxins from the blood. It can be performed in a clinic setting 3 times/week or at home several times/day.



Other treatments to think about include the use of oxygen, IV's, antibiotics, blood transfusions, chemo or radiation therapy and others. So, you can see that the use of these procedures, which at times are life prolonging and at other times life saving, is very complicated. In choosing a Medical Power of Attorney to make decisions on your behalf, it is important to identify someone who can comfortably talk with your physicians, take in information and recommendations, understand your end of life and care preferences and make these decisions for you if you are unable to do so.

Issues to consider in establishing Advance Directives:

- Everyone 18 years of age and older needs Advance Directives. If not stipulated ahead of time, the order of who can make decisions for you are: legal guardian, spouse, adult child, parent, adult sibling.
- An Advance Directive only goes into effect when you can no longer make your own health care decisions. As long as you are able to give "informed consent," your health care providers will rely on you and not on your Advance Directives.
- It is important in choosing someone to be your Medical Power of Attorney that 1) you have discussion with this person about your health and end of life care beliefs, values and preferences and 2) that the person chosen feels comfortable following your directives and you trust them to do so. A close family member may or may not be the best choice – perhaps a good friend or extended relative can do this more comfortably.
- Put everything in writing. Each state has its own laws so you may want to consult an attorney.
- Give copies of your documents to your doctor, lawyer, local hospital, the person designated as your medical power of attorney, and perhaps other family members or friends. Review the documents annually along with a review of your will or, if your personal or health condition changes.
- Encourage your loved ones to complete Advance Directives for themselves so you can better support their end of life and care preferences too.

More Information:

- Contact an attorney: National Association of Elder Law Attorneys through <http://www.naela.com>
- <http://www.agingwithdignity.org>
- www.aarp.org
- Five Wishes: 1-888-5WISHES

If you need help with this or other personal issues, please contact the FEAP at (434) 243-2643 or visit our website at www.uvafeap.com.



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