

SOMETHING EVERY ADULT NEEDS –AN ADVANCE HEALTH CARE DIRECTIVE

Waking up in a hospital is probably your worst nightmare. What happened? And what are these tubes and beeping machines? Hopefully this never becomes your reality. But if it does, who decides how you'll be treated?

AN ADVANCE HEALTH CARE DIRECTIVE decides -----IF YOU HAVE ONE.

An Advance Health Care Directive, or a Health Directive for short, is a signed document that clearly lays out your wishes when it comes to medical care. It allows you to appoint a friend or advocate to make medical decisions for you if you're unconscious or incapacitated. It puts limits, if you want them, on the measures doctors might use to keep you alive.

It tells everyone – your doctors, hospital staff and family how you want to be treated during a health emergency. It helps everyone.

Every adult needs an Advance Directive. No matter how you live your life, something can happen, to land you in an emergency room - a once-in-a-century pandemic, a two second misstep on the patio, a genetic weakness you didn't even know you had – a thousand little things can knock you out of commission.

Of course, all these misfortunes can hit a young person as well, which is why every adult should have an Advance Directive. Without this document, you cannot speak for your grown children if they become ill or have an accident.

You can see why this is so important and that all family members should have one.

The Advance Directive is just one tool in a smart estate plan. Here are a few things to consider:

1. How would you feel about the extraordinary measures a doctor might use to keep you alive? Would you want mechanical help to breath? Do you object to a blood transfusion? Would you ask doctors to use cardiopulmonary resuscitation on you, or refuse that procedure? You may want doctors to do everything science allows, including experimental surgery or hooking you up to life support. On the other hand, you may might have strong feelings about your quality of life and want to spell out specific limits.
2. Who will you appoint as your agent to speak for you if you cannot communicate? You can appoint a 2nd and 3rd person to speak for you, just in case the first one can't be reached in an emergency situation. Have a serious talk with that person(s) to make sure they're willing to accept the responsibility before signing them up. In that discussion you need to tell them what you want for your care. You want them to be clear.
3. If such a decision makes you uncomfortable, remember that without an Advance Directive, doctors who don't know you will make decision to keep you alive. Your family might be asked questions about what you'd want done, and then blame themselves if they guess wrong.

4. With an Advance Directive, you can also outline your preferences for the end of your life. You choose whether you want your body to be autopsied, if you want your body and organs donated and to describe how your remains would be treated.
5. You can change the form any time if you change your mind about any of your preferences. You can replace an old Advance Directive with a new one.
6. Since we all hope our incapacity will be temporary, be assured that once you are well enough to interact with the doctors yourself, your health care decisions all revert back to you.

WHAT TO DO ONCE YOU HAVE AN ADVANCE DIRECTIVE?: IT MUST BE ACCESSIBLE.

1. Have one in your home, in its own file or in an insurance file or important papers file.
2. Have it scanned and keep it on your phone.
3. Give copies to members of your family and to the first agent you have chosen.
4. Your primary care doctor and your preferred hospital can file it with your medical records.
5. Give a copy to your church.
6. In California there is an Advance Directive Registry which is a central clearing house that medical facilities can access.

Please contact an estate attorney to provide you with this invaluable part of your estate plan.

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