

Advance Care Planning Discussion Guide

Planning for future medical choices is important for everyone, from healthy adults to people with serious illnesses. Follow these five steps to get started.

Step 1. Talk about it.

Even in families that are very close, it can be hard to start the conversation. Here are some ideas.

News stories - Have you ever seen a news story about someone who was seriously hurt and on life support? What was your reaction? What do the people who are closest to you think?

Experiences – has anyone close to you become very ill, so that others had to make decisions about their medical treatment? What did that make you think about what you would want for yourself and your family?

My thoughts about news stories or personal experiences: _____

Step 2. Choose Someone to Speak for You.

If you cannot speak for yourself, doctors need to depend on one person that you trust to speak for you. This person will authorize your medical treatments if you cannot, and they are responsible for making decisions the way you would have done for yourself. When you name this person on an Advance Directive, they have legal authority and are called a Healthcare Agent.

You should also choose a second person, in case the first person is not available. If you want more people to be involved in making important decisions, you can direct that your Healthcare Agent work with others, but they will remain the spokesperson and will be responsible for seeing that your own choices are honored.

If you do not name your own Healthcare Agent on an Advance Directive, Virginia law directs physicians to work with your next of kin. If the person that you trust most is not your next of kin, it is especially important to name that person on an Advance Directive.

When you choose a Healthcare Agent, they should be able to:

- Understand the choices that you would make for yourself
- Honor your choices, even if they disagree
- Be available to talk with doctors and others on the health care team about your medical care

Naming a Healthcare Agent on an Advance Directive is important for every adult, even when they are healthy. Unfortunately, accidents or sudden illnesses can happen to anyone, so it is never too soon to have these conversations.

People that could be my Healthcare Agent: _____

Once you have decided who you trust as your Healthcare Agent, schedule some time to talk with them about the topics in this guide. You can also give them the tear-out page at the end of this workbook as guidance for how to be a Healthcare Agent.

Step 3. Decide what kind of medical treatment you would want if you were sick or injured and not expected to recover.

If you are healthy, chances are that your Advance Directive will only be needed if you had an unexpected illness (like a stroke) or injury (like a brain injury). In these situations, doctors do everything possible to save your life and treat you in the hospital in hopes of a full recovery. If recovery does not seem likely after the initial treatments and you remain unable to interact with people, your Healthcare Agent will need to know how you would want them to proceed.

My thoughts about being kept alive if I am not able to interact with anyone and there is little or no chance of recovery:

For people who have serious illnesses, your doctor can be a guide to what complications could arise, and what medical treatments could be offered. With your doctor's guidance, you may be able to give some specific instructions to your Healthcare Agent about your wishes. Some good questions to start with are:

- How serious might this illness get?
- What symptoms can I expect if things worsen?
- How can these symptoms be controlled?
- What kind of help will I possibly need in the future?

Other questions for my doctor: _____

At the end of a terminal illness, some people want their care to be focused on comfort and face the end of life naturally. Others want life-sustaining treatments to continue so that they can live as long as possible.

My thoughts about being kept alive at the end of a terminal illness: _____

Other concerns I have about medical treatments: _____

Step 4. Write It Down.

You can use an Advance Directive to tell people about the treatments you **do** want, as well as anything that you **do not** want. An Advance Directive can include your wishes about health care at any time, including end of life due to illness or injury. You can change your Advance Directive any time, as long as you can make and understand your own decisions.

Many forms of Advance Directives are available. All are acceptable, as long as they include your name, signature and date, and the signatures of two witnesses. Some forms include specific choices for how you want to be treated if you had a permanent and severe brain injury and if you were terminally ill. It also contains a section on general health care, so that you can specify your wishes for treatment at any time that you cannot communicate, regardless of the prognosis. This is useful for people with a serious illness who are not yet in the last stages.

There are special considerations for people who are dealing with mental health issues. If you are receiving treatment for a mental illness, you may wish to have the mental health addendum. This is available at riversideonline.com, or you can call 757-856-7030 for guidance.

Things I want my Advance Directive to say about medical treatments that I do or do not want: _____

If you specifically do not want Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) right now, this wish cannot be honored unless it is in the form of a doctor's order. Be sure to talk with your doctor if this is important to you.

Step 5. Share it.

Give a copy of your Advance Directive to your Healthcare Agent, close family members and anyone else that needs to understand your wishes. Keep the original for yourself. Be sure to give a copy to your doctor so that it can be included in your medical record.

Any time you are admitted to the hospital, someone will need to bring the most recent version of your Advance Directive, even if you have brought it to the hospital before. This is the best way to be sure your wishes are recognized and honored wherever you receive medical care.

If you make changes, be sure to replace all of the copies. Remember to review it often and discuss it with your doctor at least every year and when there are changes in your health.

People who should get a copy of my Advance Directive: _____

Guidance for Health Care Agents

As a Healthcare Agent, you will need to:

- Understand the choices that this person would make for themselves if they were ever injured or became too sick to make their own decisions
- Honor their choices, even if you disagree
- Be available to talk with doctors and others on the health care team

This special, trusting relationship is only about health care choices. You will not be responsible for medical expenses because your name is on an Advance Directive.

Your powers as a Healthcare Agent are usually spelled out on an Advance Directive. Review this together and ask questions if you do not understand.

You may wish to go to the doctor together, especially if there is a health condition that could result in certain decisions having to be made. This will help you know what to expect and to honor the choices that this person would make for themselves

For Additional Information, please contact:

Riverside Care Navigation 757-856-7030

www.riversideonline.com/advancedirective

As You Wish Advance Care Planning 757-325-9400

www.Asyouwishvirginia.org