

Explanation of Documents Related to Medical Decision Making

Please call Hospice & Palliative Care of Greater Wayne County at 330-264-4899 or, in Ohio, 800-884-6547 to talk with someone in more detail about these documents

Advance Directives: Advance Directives are made in advance of the need, and direct a person's care. They are a written method for your loved one to plan and communicate his/her treatment choices. They provide legal protection for your loved one's rights.

These advance directives include a **Living Will** and a **Health Care Power of Attorney** (This is sometimes called a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care. **This is not the same as a power of attorney for financial decisions.**) It is **not** necessary to have an attorney prepare these documents for you. You may prepare them yourself and have them witnessed by non-related persons. (See specific witness limitations on the forms.) These legal forms are available on this website under the "Forms" section.

Living Will is a document you develop when you are healthy. It gives the doctor and your family directions about what life-prolonging treatments or procedures, you want to receive. It goes into effect ***only if and when you are diagnosed as having a terminal illness*** (an irreversible, incurable and untreatable condition caused by disease, illness, or injury) ***or are in a permanently unconscious state*** (an irreversible condition in which you are permanently unaware of yourself and your surroundings). Any procedure for providing comfort or pain relief will continue to be used. It has a specific section which deals with artificial nutrition and hydration (feeding tubes and fluids).

Health Care Power of Attorney assigns another person to make medical decisions and goes into effect when the person cannot make decisions for himself/herself. This applies to all types of health care situations, not just end of life situations. (For example, if a person is unconscious during surgery or following an accident.) It is important to choose someone for your health care agent who knows you very well, cares about you, and who can make difficult decisions. Sometimes a spouse or family member may not be the best choice because he/she is too emotionally involved. Sometimes a spouse or family member ***is*** the best choice. You know best. Choose someone who is likely to be nearby so that he/she can help when needed. Make sure you talk with the person you choose and be sure that this person agrees to respect and follow your wishes.

It is also possible to complete a **Donor Registry Enrollment Form** to ensure that your wishes concerning organ and tissue donation will be honored. This document serves as your consent to recover organs and/or tissues indicated at the time of your death, if medically possible. By completing the form, your wishes will be recorded in the Ohio Donor Registry and will be accessible only to the appropriate organ, tissue or eye recovery organizations.

Do Not Resuscitate Order (DNR) is a medical order and must be signed by a physician. It is **appropriate only for those persons who are seriously ill**. There are two levels of DNR. In the **Do Not Resuscitate Comfort Care – Arrest** the focus is on saving the person's life. Everything will be done with that goal in mind. **However, once the person's heart stops or breathing stops, the person is allowed to die.**

In the **Do Not Resuscitate Comfort Care** comfort and pain relief will be provided. The person will be allowed to die naturally and no CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) will be administered. The second page of the form lists specific procedures that will be performed and specific procedures that will not be performed.

It is important that these documents be readily available. **(Do not put them in a safe deposit box.)** Photocopies are as acceptable as the original. Give copies to your physician and family members so that they are aware of your wishes. Have extra copies available in case the Emergency Squad is called to your home. Some people reduce the completed forms on a photocopy machine so that they fit easily into a purse or the glove compartment of the car.

Sometimes the very ill patient finds the legal documents just too overwhelming too complete. You as the caregiver may wish to have some type of written record of his/her wishes. The following very simple document may be printed on your computer and used in this way. It would probably not stand up in court, but it will provide a written record of your discussion.

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