

Advance Care Planning

At Baptist MD Anderson, we want to help you think about future health care choices. It is important to understand your options and what decisions you would like to make before the need arises.

What is advance care planning?

Advance care planning is an ongoing process of talking about your goals, values and wishes in terms of your health care. You are encouraged to discuss these topics with your family, friends and support system who represent you and your health care team.

It helps to have these talks with your support system and health care team early so that you may think through your options and state what is important to you about your future health care decisions. If your support system or health care team should need to make choices when you are ill, they can do so with confidence that they are following your wishes.

What are advance directives?

An advance directive is one way for you to make your wishes known about medical treatment, even before you need such care. Two important types of advance directives are:

1. **Health Care Surrogate** Your health care surrogate is an adult you select to make health care choices for you if you are unable to or choose not to do so for yourself.
2. **Living Will** A living will allows you to tell people which treatments you would like and which you would want to avoid if you are in certain health situations.

You do not need a lawyer to complete these forms. Admissions and other health care team members will ask you for a copy to include in your medical record. If you have questions, talk to your Baptist MD Anderson health care provider, social worker or chaplain.

How is advance care planning different from advance directives?

Advance care planning is a process of thinking through and talking about your goals, values and wishes as they affect your health care. An advance directive is a legal document that states your wishes about treatment and who you would like your decision maker to be should you become unable to make medical decisions for yourself.

Why do I need to plan? Why should I think about this now?

By thinking about your wishes now, you can plan ahead. It allows you to communicate your medical preferences clearly to your support system and health care team. Talk with your friends, family and support system and state exactly what you want. It also helps avoid stress in a time of crisis when people making decisions on your behalf know that they are following your wishes.

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What should I ask myself to help with these decisions?

To begin, you may want to think about: What is important to me? What are my goals or values as they relate to my health care preferences? By thinking through these questions, it may help you determine your preferences in relations to:

- Use of ventilators (breathing machines)
- Hemodialysis (a process used to clean the blood when the kidneys can no longer do so)
- Artificial feeding and fluids

Whom should I choose to make health care choices for me if I am unable to do so?

Any person age 18 or older can do this for you. You may choose your spouse or partner, an adult child, a friend or someone else you know. You should choose someone you trust, who can handle the responsibility and is willing to represent your wishes.

You should discuss your goals, values and wishes with the person before you complete and sign any forms. Also, keep this person updated in case you change your mind about any of your wishes. It is important to discuss your long term goals and the amount of flexibility this person has when making decisions on your behalf.

What will the person need to do and how can he or she prepare?

The person you choose has a duty to take reasonable steps to follow your desires and your spoken and written instructions. The best way to help the person prepare is to discuss your wishes with him or her, and review the advance directive form together.

It is best if the person you choose accepts this role. Ideally, this should be done before or at the time you complete the form.

Can I change my mind?

Yes, you may change your choices whenever you like. Discuss the changes with your support system and doctor. Be sure to update your advance directive forms to reflect any changes made.

Where can I learn more?

If you have questions, talk to your care team or call Social Work at 844.632.2278.

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