

Frequently Asked Questions About Advance Directives

What is an Advance Directive?

A legal document to let others, including your health care team, know about your decisions regarding your health choices based on your values and priorities in the event you are unable to make your own medical decisions.

What are end-of-life decisions?

These are decisions you can make now, about how you want to be cared for and treated when you are dying. They can include whether to refuse or accept treatments that could prolong your life.

What is life-sustaining treatment?

A medical intervention, medication, or anything mechanical that can potentially sustain, restore, or prolong the dying process for an ill patient. These may include but are not limited to; CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) including the use of an AED (automated external defibrillator), breathing machines, medications such as antibiotics, and nutrition and hydration given through tubes or IVs.

When should I make an advanced directive?

The best time to fill out an advance directive is before you need one. In essence, you should have one before you become too sick to make your own decisions about your medical care and what you would want and what you would refuse.

Can I change my mind about my advance directive instructions?

Yes. You can change your mind about what is written in your advanced directive at any time. You can also revoke it, or take it back, any time you want. It is recommended that you look over and make any changes you want after, it has been a decade, death of a loved one has occurred, you are getting divorced, you have been diagnosed with a new condition, or your health has significantly declined, especially when you are living on your own.

How will my doctor know that I have an advanced directive?

If you have one, let your health care team know and make sure it is on record wherever you doctor. You should also tell people close to you that you have one and where it is kept. Give copies to your health care proxy or agent, so they know your wishes in case of an emergency.

What happens if I do not have an advanced directive?

If you do not have an advance directive and become unable to make your own medical decisions, you could be given medical care you did not want. If there's no advanced directive, the doctor may ask your family about your treatment.

Do I need a lawyer to write my advance directive?

Although a lawyer can be helpful, most people do not need one to fill out an advanced directive. Most hospitals in Northern Minnesota have copies of the Honoring Choices Health Care Directive and have staff such as a Social Worker that can help guide you through the document.

Does having an advance directive affect the quality of health care I receive?

No. Your health care team will only use your advanced directive to guide medical decisions when you are unable to make them for yourself, such as a medical condition defined by your state law as terminal illness or permanent unconsciousness.

Can I have a living will and a durable power of attorney for health care?

Yes, you can have both. A durable power of attorney is used after a physician certifies that you cannot make your own decisions regarding your health care. A living will is only used after two physicians certify that you are unable to make medical decisions for yourself and that your medical condition defined by your state law as terminal illness or permanent unconsciousness. If you have both documents, it is important that you ensure they do not contradict each other.

Is filing out an advance directive difficult?

Although some people may find making these decisions somewhat difficult, there are forms for you to fill out where you fill in the blank and check the box you want. Then to make the document legal, it just needs to be notarized. If you are a patient in Bigfork Valley Hospital, a notary can come to your room free of charge. Our social worker or charge nurses can also ensure a copy gets placed in your medical record.

Who can I talk to at Bigfork Valley about Health Care directives?

Our hospital social worker can help you with any questions you may have regarding your advance directive and can even provide you with blank copies so you can start your own, revise, or make changes to a current one. We can also help ensure a copy gets into our system for our health care team to access easily.

Bigfork Valley Social Services: 218-743-4273.