

Advance Directives

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What are they?

Most of us have not thought about how much medical care we want at the end of our lives. However, the ability to prolong life has created serious concerns for patients and families.

Advance Directives put into writing your choices for health care and they may also name someone to speak in your behalf if you are unable to express your wishes. Idaho State law provides for two kinds of advance directives. . . a *Living Will* (Directive to Physicians) and a *Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care*. Talking to your doctor, your family and friends or those close to you and putting your decisions into writing now will help assure that your wishes are followed.

What is a Living Will?

A Living Will is an advance directive which specifies the kind of life-prolonging medical care you want provided or withheld if you should become terminally ill and unable to make important treatment decisions. The Living Will gives you three choices; **Choice A:** You want everything done to keep you alive, including CPR and artificial life supports. **Choice B:** You do not want to be kept alive on artificial life supports. However, you do want food and hydration through tubes if necessary. **Choice C:** You do not want artificial life supports or intervention. You do not want food and hydration through tubes.

A Living Will should be signed, dated and witnessed by two people who know you well, but aren't related to you and aren't potential heirs or your health care providers.

Remember, advance directives only take effect when a patient is unable to communicate informed decisions or give directions regarding his or her care and the patient is in a diagnosed terminal condition or persistent vegetative state.

What is a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care?

A Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care names another person to make medical decisions for you if you are unable to make them for yourself. This person may be your spouse, family member or a friend who knows

you well and could act in your behalf. You can include instructions about any treatment you want or don't want. A Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care should be signed by you, dated and witnessed by two people (as for a Living Will) or a notary public.

Remember, this power of attorney is for medical decision making unlike the general power of attorney for financial decisions. They each serve important and separate purposes.

What if I change my mind?

You may change or cancel advance directives at any time. If you alter your directives, they should be signed and dated, and revised copies given to your family and your doctor. Even without an official written change, your verbal instructions to your physician have priority over any statement made in a Living Will or Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care as long as you're able to decide for yourself and communicate your wishes.

If I have no Advance Directive, who will make my decisions?

Your family and physician usually join together to decide about your treatment. They will be guided by any personal statements you have made about your values and feelings concerning end-of-life decisions.

How do I prepare Advance Directives?

First, you will want to give careful thought to your decisions. You must be at least 18 and acting of your own free will. When you are ready to put your decisions in writing, a Living Will is on the reverse side of this sheet. A Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care form can be obtained from your family doctor, the hospital or in stationery stores. You don't need to consult an attorney to prepare advance directives.

It is very important to let your spouse, family members or whomever you appointed to act in your behalf, know what you have included in your directive and where you are keeping the document.