

Advance Care Planning

What is it?

Advance Care Planning (ACP) is an ongoing process of learning about the choices we each have related to our future medical care. It establishes personal guidelines and considers our individual wishes and values in situations where we cannot speak for ourselves.

ACP discussions are often very different depending on individual health status. Someone who is generally healthy should explore those life sustaining treatments that would be acceptable if suddenly the ability to think or speak for one's self is lost.

Someone with a chronic illness, on the other hand, may choose to think about what health care treatments would be acceptable if his or her condition worsened. Advance care planning allows individuals to express their wishes to their loved ones at any stage of their diagnosis.

For each of these individuals, the Advance Care Planning process is similar and includes:

- Learning about medical treatment options and goals for treatment outcomes
- Taking time to explore thoughts and feelings about life-saving or life-sustaining treatments
- Choosing a Healthcare Advocate—someone who is very familiar with your preferences and will speak on your behalf when you are unable to speak for yourself
- Putting those wishes into writing

My Choices, My Wishes



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Facts About Choosing and Being a Healthcare Proxy

What is a Healthcare Proxy?

A healthcare advocate, or proxy, is someone designated by a patient to make future medical decisions in the event the patient is not able to make decisions for themselves.

The patient should trust their chosen advocate to understand their health situation, and be able to speak compassionately and frankly about their healthcare preferences.

How does someone begin the process of selecting a healthcare advocate?

Think about:

- Are there persons with whom they share cultural and religious or spiritual views?
- Are they good listeners and effective communicators?
- Would speaking openly to these individuals about personal health circumstances feel comfortable?
- Who is willing to learn as much as possible about the patient's wishes and values regarding the use of medical technology?
- Who is able to ask questions of physicians and family, even if the conversations are difficult?

What are the responsibilities of a healthcare advocate?

The healthcare advocate should know and understand the patient's current health status and expected outlook (prognosis). They may need to be assertive and ask questions. Consider asking advocates to participate with routine doctor visits to establish relationships.

They must clearly understand goals of the treatment plan. There may be unexpected events that require quick decision making. The advocate may need to make choices about situations not previously thought about.

What does my healthcare advocate need to know?

Patients should communicate to their advocate what it means for them to have an acceptable quality of life. Discuss what medical treatments the patient does and does not want. Because views may change, plan to have a series of conversations over time. Expect that it will be hard to anticipate every healthcare situation possible. Speaking openly helps to clarify what the patient wants and gives the advocate confidence that he or she is doing the right thing.

Regardless of current health status, ensuring that loved ones and healthcare providers are aware of one's wishes and values is the most effective way to ensure these choices are honored. Through several high profile cases, recent history has revealed the private agony and public uproar resulting from disagreement about healthcare preferences. The ongoing process of conversation and documentation of personal wishes and values serves as both a gift and protection for you and your family.

If you would like to discuss your values and goals or speak with someone who can tell you more about the advance care planning process, please talk with your physician.