



PLANNING ESSENTIALS

What is an advance directive and why you need one?

The painful decisions that some family members needed to make for loved ones as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic brought the importance of having a formal advance directive in place to the forefront. Decisions around the need to intubate, use of a ventilator, or conversations with family members about end of life decisions are never easy even during the best of times.

Also known as a health care directive, an advance directive helps family members know what type of medical care their loved ones want if they are incapacitated or unable to speak for themselves. It is an essential part of a comprehensive plan. Planning ahead can ensure that a loved one's healthcare decisions are carried out, even if they are no longer able to communicate their intentions. In the absence of an advance directive, additional layers of stress fall on other family members as they try to balance their own feelings with what you or a loved one may want.

HEALTH CARE DIRECTIVE

An advance of health care directive is a written legal document that expresses your healthcare wishes. You can also appoint someone to make decisions on your behalf.

Your instructions can address your desires as it relates to (but not limited to): Types of treatment, ventilators, dialysis, feeding tube, blood transfusions, other life sustaining treatment options, organ donation, and funeral arrangements.

Your health care directive is effective until you cancel it. However, it is recommended that you update it periodically.

Health care providers are asking patients suffering from COVID-19 to bring any existing directives with them (in a sealed bag) when seeking medical care to make their intentions clear and to discuss with their physicians. If a directive has not been prepared, it may still be possible to communicate intentions, but depending on how ill the patient is, it may not be possible.

BOTTOM LINE: An advance direction carefully drafted with a qualified legal advisor can provide a sense of control and peace of mind knowing that any desired intentions will be followed and are consistent with values and preferences.

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