

What is Advance Care Planning?



The way we are cared for matters. Advance Care Planning (ACP) is thinking about health care choices you may face in the future and helping others know ahead of time what your choices are. Planning ahead is important for adults at any age or stage of health. The goal of ACP is to help ensure that you get medical care that is consistent with your values, goals and care preferences.

Think about what matters to you

Some people who are very sick are not able to speak for themselves or to make their own decisions. This leaves care decisions in the hands of others who may not know what really matters to that person. While most people think advance care planning is important, they have a hard time knowing where to start. The most important way to start planning ahead is to ask:

- Who do I trust to make medical decisions for me if I can't make them myself?
- If I had a sudden illness or accident, how much have I told my loved ones and doctors about how I would want to be cared for? Have I told them enough?

- What are the most important things my loved ones and doctors should know about my values, beliefs and what gives me strength in difficult times?
- If I had a serious illness, how much information would I want to know? Who else would I want to have this information to support me and to know what to expect?

Learn about treatment options

Advance care planning forms may give you choices about using ventilators (breathing machines), feeding tubes, and attempts at CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation). Learn about these choices now when you have time to think about them and ask questions. This will help you consider when and if you would want these treatments.

In a time of crisis, there may be little or no time to get the information. You and your loved ones may feel pressured to make a decision quickly. We have fact sheets to help you learn more about these treatments in advance. Ask your doctor for more information.

Put your wishes in writing

After you have thought about what matters most to you and who you trust to make decisions for you, talk with your loved ones and your doctor. You should put in writing which treatments you want or don't want during an illness or at the end of life. Writing your choices down puts you in control and gives your loved ones a guide for your care if you can't speak for yourself. They will not have to guess.

Advance directives

Advance directives are forms that name someone you trust (called an "agent" or "power of attorney for health care") to make health care decisions for you if you cannot make them yourself. Advance directives allow you to give instructions about your care near the end of life, if you are not expected to recover, or in other serious health care situations. You can revoke your advance directive at any time or make a new advance directive if your wishes change.

DNR (do not resuscitate) form

A DNR is a medical order signed by a doctor. It is not an advance directive. You may be asked at some point in your health care whether or not you would want CPR. If you decide against CPR, your doctor would need to sign a DNR order for you. Unlike an advance directive that includes wishes about your care, a DNR form is used only to tell emergency care providers and health care teams that you do not want CPR attempted if your heart or breathing stopped. Review the CPR fact sheet to learn more. Please talk with your doctor if you want to make a decision about CPR at this time.

Next steps

If you would like to meet with someone to learn more about ACP or to review and complete an advance directive, tell us today. We have trained staff who would be happy to help you. Be sure to give a copy of your written forms to your decision maker, your loved ones and to your health team to store in your medical record.