

# ***A Guide to Advance Directives***

## **Providence Hospital**

At Providence Hospital, we respect the sacred rights of patients to make their own decisions about the care they would like to receive. Providence has a patient bill of rights and we encourage planning before need. We have a dedicated team of caregivers committed to your well-being and your right to direct your care.

Thinking about the kind of medical care you would choose in life-or-death situations can be uncomfortable. Difficult questions come up: Would you want to be kept alive with the help of a respirator, for example? If you were terminally ill and near death, would you choose to be resuscitated if your heart stopped beating? What medical treatment would you choose if you had a stroke that left you completely dependent upon other people?

Experts agree it is important for you to answer these questions, and share your answers with others, so you get the kind of care you want in such situations—even if you're unable to communicate.

The best way to ensure you get the kind of care that reflects your choices and values is to do some advance care planning and prepare an “advance directive.” An advance directive lets doctors and others know what kind of treatment you do and do not want. If you are ever too sick to make decisions for yourself, your advance directive speaks for you, letting others know what kind of medical care you want.



The ideal advance directive includes two parts:

1. A “durable power of attorney for healthcare” (DPAHC)
2. A “living will.”

A **durable power of attorney for health care** (DPAHC) is an advance directive appointing someone to make medical decisions for a person if in the future he/she cannot make his/her own medical decisions. This person—known as a “surrogate” or “advocate”—is typically a relative or close friend, not a member of your health care team.

A **living will** is an advance directive that tells what medical treatment a person does or does not want if he/she is not able to make his/her wishes known. A typical living will addresses a variety of conditions from a sudden accident to declining health caused by a chronic condition.

Preparing an advance directive is not complicated. You do not need a lawyer, but you can choose to have a lawyer help you. Different states have different laws concerning advance directives and you can find free DPHAC and living will forms for the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia under the patient/visitor tab on the Providence Hospital website ([www.provhosp.org](http://www.provhosp.org)). The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization website, ([www.nhpco.org](http://www.nhpco.org)) can provide forms for other states. Just follow the instructions accompanying the forms to complete them. The best forms describe different medical situations, such as being in a coma, and list care options for each; you simply check the options you want.

These three tips can also help you prepare an advance directive:

**1. Talk to your relatives, friends, and healthcare providers and give them copies of your advance directive**

- Explain your wishes so your family, friends, and providers understand and are prepared. It is a good idea to make multiple copies of your advance directive and give them to your doctor, hospital, and loved ones. A copy should go into your medical record. And you should bring a copy with you each time you are admitted to a hospital.

**2. Keep a copy**

- Put another copy of your advance directive in a safe, easy-to-find place, and let your loved ones know where it is. You may also want to put a note in your wallet explaining that you have an advance directive and where it can be found.

**3. Review and revise your advance directive as needed**

- Advance directives do not expire. An advance directive remains in effect until you change it. If you complete a new advance directive, it invalidates the previous one. Over time, you may change your mind about what kinds of treatment you would, and wouldn't, want. If you do, you should revise your advance directive and give everyone a copy of the new version.



**Our Mission**

*Rooted in the loving ministry of Jesus as healer, we serve all persons with joy, care, and respect, giving special attention to persons who are poor and vulnerable. Our Catholic health ministry improves the health of individuals and of our community with compassion and justice.*