

Making Hard Decisions a Little Bit Easier

Sometimes it's a challenge for me to come up with interesting topics to write about for the email blast. I'm certain our community gets bored reading about my take on nutrition and fitness. How many times can I discuss the merits of fiber and Fitbits? This time around I'm going to write about a sensitive topic, one that can bring peace of mind to families: advance care planning. Otherwise known as an advance directive, this kind of document provides instructions to doctors about a patient's wishes.



Did you know that April 16 is National Healthcare Decisions Day (NHDD)? Neither did I. I also find it fascinating this day follows our tax deadline. I'm talking about a day which brings awareness to the importance of making a provision for health care decisions in the event that, in the future, an individual is rendered incompetent to make such choices. There are two main types of an advance directive: a living will and the durable power of attorney for health. Both of these documents are responsible for making a patient's wishes known should he/she at some point becomes unable to do so.

Think about how you would wish to be treated in the event you end up in a permanent state of unconsciousness or on life support, and unable to make decisions about treatment. This document empowers the patient to decide what extreme measures he/she wants taken in the event he/she ends up in this situation. As we get older, planning for the kind of healthcare we want becomes a necessity. I realize this isn't the sort of conversation aging parents want to have with their adult children. Nonetheless, this information could help make a stressful medical situation more manageable.

Speaking from experience, it would be a tremendous help to your loved ones, especially your adult children, to put your wishes in writing before problems arise. You may want to have in writing the kinds of medical treatments you want and don't want. You also may want to include the authorization of another person such as a spouse or child to make medical decisions for you in the event you are no longer capable of making them on your own. Having this document in place will prevent a delay in the administering of a treatment plan.

The next time you are with your parents, I encourage you to initiate a discussion about their future health care decisions. With the help of a healthcare provider, a patient can put these decisions in writing with an attorney in order to have them legally bound. You can change your directives at any time but be sure to make these changes known to your loved ones and medical care providers.

Yours in Health,
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Sources: NHDD, Initiative of the Conversation Project; Healthcare Directives, NIH.org

