

Information on Advance Directives (Living Will)

There may be a time in your life when you are unable to make healthcare choices for yourself. Some serious decisions that people are often called upon to make include treatment choices, artificial life support, and quality of life. You have a choice about medical interventions such as ventilators, CPR, drugs to sustain blood pressure, antibiotics and artificial nutrition (food) and hydration (water).

There are two legal documents which allow you to express your wishes about healthcare decisions. These documents allow you to determine your decision about certain medical treatments and procedures in advance of illness or life threatening circumstances.

An advance healthcare directive consists of a living will and a power of attorney for healthcare. You may complete either or both of these documents.

A living will allows you to decide for yourself how you would address specific end of life decisions. There are three choices that the living will provides:

- 1) Not to prolong life:
 - a) In the case of an incurable and irreversible condition that will result in your death within a relatively short time.
 - b) You become unconscious and, to a reasonable degree of medical certainty, will not regain consciousness.
 - c) The likely risks and burdens of treatment would outweigh the expected benefits. This choice also allows you to determine if you want to receive artificial food and water based on the conditions listed above. Unless you were to specifically object, this choice would also provide treatment to ease any pain and discomfort.

- 2) To prolong your life as long as possible within the limits of generally accepted healthcare standards.

- 3) To make a specific choice yourself but allow a person of your choice (power of attorney for healthcare decisions) to make end-of-life decisions for you.

A power of attorney for healthcare allows you to choose a person to make healthcare decisions for you, should you become incapacitated. You can limit the type of decisions that your agent may make for you, if you choose to do so. This document provides a place for you to list alternative agents, should your original agent be unavailable or unable to act. Your agent's authority becomes effective when your primary physician and one other qualified healthcare professional determine that you are unable to make your own healthcare decisions.

You can also use this form to designate a person to make your current healthcare decisions, even though you are completely capable of making those decisions for yourself. Some persons prefer not

to be involved in the decision making process of their healthcare at any stage and designate another person to make current and future decisions for them by completing a power of attorney for healthcare.

You do not have to sign any form if you choose not to do so. If you do not sign a form or tell your doctor about whom you want to make your healthcare decisions (or if someone you identify is not reasonably available), a family member who is reasonably available may act. Family members are selected to act on your behalf in descending order: spouse/significant other, adult child, parent, adult brother or sister, grandparent, close friend.

Advance directives (living will and power of attorney for healthcare) allow you to make your own choices about medical decisions. Making decisions in advance will provide direction and perhaps comfort to family members or agents who may make significant choices on your behalf.