

Important to have advance health care directives

By Leanne Wagoner

There may come a time in your life when you become injured unexpectedly or are too sick to make health care decisions for yourself. Who do you want to make medical decisions for you? What type of life-saving measures do you want to keep you alive?

Here are a few reasons you may want to complete your advance directive today:

- An advance directive is a legal document that can speak for you, when you're not able to speak for yourself – for example if you are in a coma. It provides written instructions regarding your medical care and life-sustaining preferences.



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- It relieves your loved ones from making medical decisions for you and can reduce confusion or disagreements about the care you should receive.

- Choosing someone to act as your health care agent who will carry out your requests may be the most important part of your planning. He or she should be mature, level-headed, and comfortable with difficult conversations. It doesn't have to be a family member and you shouldn't pick someone because of

guilt or obligation.

Here are additional considerations:

- Living wills and other advance directives aren't just for older adults. Because sudden illness or accidents can happen at any age, all adults need advance directives.
- Your advance directive should be in writing. You can find state-specific forms online by searching "advance directives" or at websites such as the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. You can also obtain an advance directive at your primary care physician's office.
- Make sure you talk about your wishes, and give copies to your family members, health care providers and health care agent. Take a copy with you if you are admitted to the hospital. You can change your decisions at any time. Be sure to tell everyone involved – family members, health care agent, and primary care provider when you make changes.

To revise your information, follow the same steps you used to create you advanced directive.

Advance directives are available in your primary care physician's office. You may also download an advance directive. There is no cost to complete this legal document provided by each state.

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