

Advance Care Planning

Frequently Asked Questions by Patients

Q: How will an Advance Care Planning (ACP) help me and my loved ones?

Advance Care Planning (ACP) involves the discussion and documentation of an individual's preferences and values to guide their future healthcare in case they lose capacity to make or communicate their own treatment decisions. ACP will enable your loved ones to tell the doctors what you want and what you don't want if there's an emergency and you can't talk for yourself. They will not have to guess and will follow your wishes in how you want to be treated.

Q: What are Advance Care Directives (ACD)?

Advance care planning can involve the individual's completion of an Advance Care Directive (ACD) - which is a legal document that may include appointment of a substitute decision-maker and instructions for medical care. It only goes into effect if you cannot communicate your own wishes in a medical emergency.

Q: Does talking about end of life mean that I'm dying?

No. We don't know what today or tomorrow will bring. Something unplanned might happen to us at any time so we all must be ready when it's needed.

Q: What happens if I don't complete Advance Care Planning (ACP)?

If you don't have ACP, you become ill and unable to make health care decisions on your own, neither your family nor your health care providers will know your preferences for treatment and care. The decisions they make for you may not be what you would have chosen for yourself.

Q: Can I change my mind after I create my Advanced Care Planning (ACP)?

Yes, but you will need to complete a new one and the old one will no longer be valid.

Q: Can I make decisions about my health even if I have ACP?

Yes. Only when you can't speak does the Advanced Care Directives (ACD) take effect. It will tell your loved ones what you want and don't want, when you want it and how you want it.

Q: Who is the best person to pick as my Power of Attorney?

It has to be someone reliable and trustworthy. You have to be certain the person will respect your wishes. The person can be a family member, a friend or any person that you trust.

Q: What are end-of-life decisions?

End-of-life decisions are those you can make now about how you wish to be cared for and treated when you are not able to communicate your own wishes and preferences. End-of-life decisions can include whether to accept or refuse treatments that might prolong your life.

These decisions include but are not limited to accepting or refusing life-sustaining treatments (i.e., ventilator, artificial nutrition), resuscitation orders and organ or tissue donations. Also when nearing the end of life, preferences for where you'd like to be treated (i.e. assisted living, home), when to transition into comfort care, who you want to care for you, and other spiritual considerations can be part of your end-of-life planning.

Q: What are life-sustaining treatments?

Life-sustaining medical treatment is any medical intervention, medication, or mechanical or artificial interventions that can prolong the end-of-life process for a terminally ill patient. These may include but are not limited to CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) including use of an AED (automated external defibrillator), breathing machines, medications such as antibiotics, nutrition and hydration (food and liquids) given through feeding tubes or IVs.

Q: Is a Medical Power of Attorney the same as a Power of Attorney?

No. A medical power of attorney (MPOA) is someone you have appointed to make healthcare decisions on your behalf. This should be someone who you are confident will know your wishes and be able to voice them on your behalf, even if it is not what they would want for you or for themselves. A power of attorney (also sometimes called a financial power of attorney) is someone you have appointed to make financial and legal decisions and commitments on your behalf.

Q: After I complete the Advanced Care Directives, what should I do next?

Keep the form in a place when your loved ones can find easily in case of an emergency and tell them where it is. **DO NOT PUT IN A LOCKED SAFE.** Give a copy to the healthcare agent you named on the form and give one to your back-up health agent.

Advance Care Planning (ACP) is at the heart of being an empowered patient and is important for all adults, at all ages and stages of life.

Always discuss your Advance Care Plan with your Primary Care Physician.