



Advance Directives

Your Life

Your Healthcare

Your Decision!



St. Elizabeth's Hospital

Advance Directives

The state of Illinois established a class of documents known as “Advance Directives” which allow you to express your wishes concerning healthcare and to facilitate carrying out your wishes.

Illinois law recognizes two types of Advance Directives for medical decisions: the DURABLE POWER OF ATTORNEY FOR HEALTHCARE and the LIVING WILL.

What is a Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare?

Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare is a legal document you sign authorizing another person called an “agent,” to act on your behalf when you cannot act for yourself.

Who can be an agent?

Any person, 18 years of age, who is capable of giving consideration to healthcare matters may act as an agent. However, neither your personal physician nor any other healthcare provider who is caring for you may act as your healthcare agent. This is to avoid conflict of interest.

Can more than one person be appointed as agent?

The law governing the durable power of attorney for healthcare prohibits multiple or co-agents. The law does allow successor agents to be named in the event that your agent is unavailable or unable to fulfill his or her duties as an agent.

What powers does an agent have?

An agent can make healthcare decisions for you that you could make, including the right to require or withhold any type of treatment. The powers granted to an agent are very broad. Therefore, it is important for you to discuss your healthcare options with your agent when you appoint that person and review your decisions with your agent from time to time.

What are your healthcare options?

Imagine yourself in an unconscious condition, with irreversible brain damage, or terminally ill. then ask yourself:

- Is it important to prolong my life, regardless of pain, chances of recovery and cost?
- Would I want to forego life-prolonging measures if the chance for my recovery are not good?

What are life-prolonging measures?

Simply stated, any treatment that prolongs life. These are some of the treatments that persons with life threatening conditions usually ask about:

- Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR): The heart is externally compressed between the sternum and the backbone. CPR provides some blood circulation when the heart has stopped.
- While CPR is performed, the medical staff will try to restart the heart. This is done by injecting medicine and by “shocking the heart” (defibrillation). Oxygen is supplied by putting a tube down the windpipe (intubation) and helping the patient breathe either through a bag or machine. If the heart is restarted, the tube, which was inserted into the windpipe, may be connected to a respirator and the patient is transferred to the Critical Care Unit (CCU).

- A respirator or ventilator is a machine, which breathes for the patient through a tube inserted in the windpipe. Normal breathing might never be restored.
- Tube feeding provides nutrition and fluids through a tube inserted to the stomach or by intravenous feeding, if the patient can no longer eat and/or drink.
- Kidney dialysis cleans the patient's blood through a machine when the kidneys no longer function.

The Living Will, what is that?

The Living Will is your declaration to your attending physician that your moment of death shall not be artificially postponed. The Living Will can only take effect when you are in a terminal condition with an irreversible and incurable injury, disease or illness and you can no longer express your wishes yourself.

You may have both a Living Will and a Durable Power of Attorney, but the Durable Power of Attorney takes precedence over the Living Will. A Living Will could be a better choice for persons who do not have a suitable and/or willing agent(s).

How do you go about making a Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare or a Living Will?

Talk over your decision with your likely agent in the case of the Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare or with your attending physician for the Living Will. St. Elizabeth's Hospital Pastoral Care staff is available to help you understand and fill out the Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare or Living Will. The Pastoral Care Department can be reached by calling extension 1091.

Once I have filled out an advance directive what should I do with it?

Keep it in a place where it is readily accessible. Give a copy of the Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare to your agent, any successor agents, and your physician. If you have a Living Will, make sure that your attending physician has a copy in their file. Upon admission to the hospital, please bring a copy of your advance directives with you and they will be made a part of your chart.

What about ethical considerations? How can I get help?

St. Elizabeth's Hospital has an Ethics Committee made up of doctors and other healthcare professionals. Anyone dealing with an ethical dilemma may request an advisory consultation with this committee. This may be done by talking to your doctor, nurse or a member of the hospital's Pastoral Care Department. Members of the committee can respond in a few hours.

Other Issues?

Organ Donation

If you are under 86 years of age, you may be able to donate organs and/or tissues. Organ and tissue recovery can only take place once all efforts to save your life have been exhausted and you are legally dead. It is important that you discuss your decision with your family and agent so that they carry out your wishes. Your agent or family must give consent even if you have signed the back of your driver's license or filled out a donor card. If they do not consent, donation cannot occur. Donation costs nothing to the donors family or estate.

Hospital Policy

It is the policy of the hospital to comply with applicable law and to promote patient self-determination by encouraging the use of advance directives - so long as those preference are allowed by law and are consistent with the ethical and religious directives of the hospital.



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