

Keys to Advance Care Planning

Tell important people around you two things: who should make decisions for you when you cannot and what sorts of decisions you prefer. As this can be a complicated process involving legal, medical and financial decisions, you may consider a three step approach: start with basic planning when you are healthy; reconsider those plans when you are diagnosed with a serious, progressive illness; and become more specific and precise about your wishes as you realize that you may be in the final stages of your illness.

1. All stages of planning require thoughtful, deliberate conversations with your family and friends and your health care team. Talk about your values and any deeply held beliefs or practices that might affect your care decisions. What quality of life do you want to have? What can you live with, or without, and how can your treatment help you to reach those goals?
2. From the basic planning stages, when you choose a health care spokesperson, to the final stages, when you decide on very specific treatments, your wishes and goals may change. Periodic conversations with your doctor and family will keep everyone current about your medical situation and will also keep them up to date on what you are thinking regarding your care and treatment goals.
3. As your understanding of your experience with your illness evolves, you can always revisit, reconsider and revise your advance plans and directives.
4. Everyone (family, loved ones, health care team) **MUST** know who you have chosen to make your decisions for you as your health care proxy (also known as a durable power of attorney for health care) and know where to find your advance directive (which names your proxy and expresses your wishes). It is critical to have your advance directive readily available, not locked up in a safe deposit box.