

## Make End-of-Life Decisions Now

Sadly, accidents and medical emergencies can occur suddenly to anyone at any age resulting in families having to face difficult end-of-life decisions. Imagine the shock and surprise of such an event occurring and then having to make life sustaining treatment decisions for your loved one.

If something happened to you where you could not make life sustaining decisions for yourself, are you confident that your loved ones would make the right decisions for you? Do they know what kind of care you would want? Making your own advance directives now can save your family from the anguish of having to make them for you and also help to ensure that you receive the type of care that you would want.

Your wishes about life sustaining treatment can be spelled out in a living will. Life sustaining treatment decisions can include Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) Orders as well as decisions about feeding tubes, surgery, blood transfusions, dialysis, mechanical respiration, and antibiotics. In a situation where physicians determine that a person is in a permanent state of unconsciousness or is terminally ill and cannot express their wishes, directives on a living will can serve as a guide to family members and physicians. A living will lists what treatments you do or do not want to receive in these circumstances. A living will also allows you to name a surrogate decision maker if you become unable to make your wishes known.

Before making these decisions it is important to understand what life-sustaining treatments can and cannot do. Your doctor can give you information about the pros and cons of different kinds of treatment. Then think about the degree of recovery that you can expect from these treatments. What will your quality of life be?

Another type of advance directive is a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care decisions. This allows you to name a person to make medical decisions on your behalf if you become unable to make such decisions. Unlike a living will, a durable power of attorney for health care may take effect regardless of whether you are terminally ill or permanently unconscious. If you do decide to appoint someone to make medical decisions for you, it is important that you speak openly and honestly with that person about your wishes. Your health care agent is expected to speak for you and needs to know what you would have wanted if and when the time comes to do so.

To make all of this an easy process and to encourage you to make your advance directives, Lutheran Home Care & Hospice is providing free copies of "5 Wishes", a legal advance care planning document that is easy to use and understand and is written in everyday language that speaks to what matters most to you and me.

Please call us at 264-8178 for your free copy of "5 Wishes". Once you complete it, distribute copies to your physicians and family members and keep extra copies for the future. Review it periodically to update it with changes in your wishes or decision makers. You may change or cancel an advance directive at any time by executing a new document and destroying prior copies.

*Melanie Furlong is the Community Relations Director for Lutheran Home Care & Hospice, Inc., a ministry of Lutheran Social Services. Call 717-264-8178 or visit [www.lutheranhomecare.org](http://www.lutheranhomecare.org) for more information about how we can help you.*