

Advance Care Planning

What is Advance Care Planning?

Advance Care Planning is a process that gives you the ability to make choices about different types of medical treatments, even if you become so sick that you cannot speak for yourself. To ensure that your choices are known and honored, it's important that you learn about your options, communicate your choices with your family and health care providers, and document your decisions.

Why do Advance Care Planning?

Advance Care Planning is like drawing a map for the kind of care you want if you become extremely sick: you decide where you want to go and the paths you're willing to take to reach your destination. Every disease has an "end-stage," a point where more treatment does not cure or even return you to a quality of life that's acceptable to you. It's important to know what the benefits and burdens of various treatments are throughout the stages of your disease. Your family needs to know what is important to you.

How is Advance Care Planning done?

Discuss. Advance care planning starts with an honest discussion of your disease and how you wish to "live" during your disease. This is what you would consider as your quality of life. The main thing to consider is the balance of the benefits and burdens of different treatments, what are the side-effects from a particular drug or treatment balanced against the relief that it offers.

Document. Don't keep your decisions secret. Documenting your choices also shows others you're serious about having your choices respected.

How do I document my decisions?

Like any good map, your advance care plan should be on paper and stored in a place people can find it.

There are two basic kinds of care planning documents, or **advance directives**. One is a **Living Will**, the other is a **Power of Attorney for Health Care**. Both allow you to make specific choices about treatments in various situations. The Living Will is a statement of instruction. The Power of Attorney for Health Care allows you to appoint someone you trust (an AGENT) to "step into your shoes" when you are unable to speak for yourself.

(Maryland also recognizes The Five Wishes Directive and directives from other states as long as they do not conflict with Maryland law.)

A final thought....

No one can ever know for sure what "choices" will have to be made towards the end of life. Giving your loved ones and health care providers some direction in the process helps them know they are doing what you would have wanted.