

Looking Ahead to the Future

All people experience sickness, and one day you will have to make important decisions about your health care. It is your right and your responsibility to make decisions to accept or to refuse medical or surgical treatments. Thus, it is important to look ahead and to consider the possible health-related decisions you may face in the future.

It is advisable to discuss your views about such decisions with your family, loved ones and physician(s) so that others can make those wishes known on your behalf should you become unable to communicate. You can also help reassure your wishes are carried out by appointing a Durable Power of Attorney for health care matters or through a Living Will.

What Kinds of Decisions Might You Face?

Following are some questions that should be considered in planning your future health care needs.

- In the event of irreversible and incurable illness, would I want my life prolonged by artificial means, such as a ventilator or feeding tube?
- At what point would I want such measures stopped?
- If I were suffering from a terminal illness and my heart and/or breathing stopped, would I want resuscitation efforts undertaken?
- How aggressive would I want my doctor to be trying to keep me alive?
- Whom do I wish to make decisions for me if I am unable to do so?

Help In Making Decisions

In thinking about these and other difficult health care questions, it is helpful to obtain input from your physician(s), a nurse and/or other health care professionals. They can help you better understand available treatments/therapies and the effects of your decision(s) about the use or non-use of such treatments and therapies.

Additional help in dealing with these questions can be gained by talking with your priest, minister, rabbi or spiritual provider. They can also help you understand your role in evaluating the possible benefits and burdens of life-prolonging treatments and therapies in light of your own values and goals in life.



Three Steps To Follow

First: You must be as clear as possible about the values that influence your decisions in health care matters. From that basis, you can determine which treatments or therapies you would want undertaken in various situations. This is usually accomplished through discussion(s) with your physician(s), family members, close friends and your minister, priest, rabbi or spiritual provider. This step of the process is crucial and helps assure that your decisions are a reflection of your values and beliefs.

Second: You should document your wishes as clearly and specifically as possible. While this may be done in a couple of written formats, it is important to remember that the goal of such a document is to assist others in making decisions about your care if you are unable to do so. You may appoint a **Durable Power of Attorney** for health care matters. The person you name has the power to make health care decisions for you if you are unable to do this by yourself. The person you choose should be someone you trust

and who has a clear understanding of your values and wishes. It does not



have to be a member of your family. The person you choose will be the person with whom your doctors and others discuss your medical care in the event that you are unable to do so. In Missouri, it is important for you to be specific in your written Durable Power of Attorney about your wishes regarding the use of artificially supplied food and liquids.

You may also write your wishes in a **Living Will**. It is legally binding in a narrow set of circumstances surrounding terminal illness. Regardless of its legal limitations, it is an effective guide for loved ones and caregivers in assuring that your wishes are followed during a serious illness.

Finally: Your wishes and the document(s) should be given to everyone who is likely to be involved in making decisions about your care. This may include your family, physician(s) and/or spiritual provider. If you are hospitalized, bring along a copy for your medical records.

For additional information, please talk with your health care provider. They will assist you or direct you to more appropriate resources.

