



ADVANCE DIRECTIVES

“Advance Directives” are legal documents that allow you to plan and communicate your wishes for medical care should you not be able to speak for yourself. These documents can take many forms. Two of the most common are (1) a living will, and (2) a durable medical (healthcare) power of attorney. A living will describes your wishes regarding very specific types of medical care when you are near death. With a medical power of attorney, you can appoint a person to make your healthcare decisions for you in case you are unable to speak for yourself (Caringconnections.org, 2009). *Pikes Peak Hospice & Palliative Care recommends that our patients communicate with their care team, and at least complete a medical power of attorney.*

A durable medical power of attorney identifies the person you trust to help make medical decisions with your medical team when you are unable to speak for yourself. It is important to discuss your wishes, values, and goals for medical care with your appointed medical power of attorney before you become too ill to talk. In Colorado, the medical power of attorney document does not require a lawyer or notary to complete. (Witness and notary for this document are more important if you want to be very sure there is no confusion about who is your medical power of attorney).

A living will is a way for you to indicate to your medical team in writing what very specific life-prolonging treatments you would or would not want.

Written advance directives are legal in every state. However, laws and forms vary from state to state. To access Colorado laws, see http://www.helpguide.org/mental/advance_directive_end_of_life_care.htm.

Some common misunderstandings about advance directives include:

1. Many people believe that **if a loved one has financial power of attorney he/she doesn't need a separate medical power of attorney.** This is not true. Most often these are separate legal documents.
2. Patients often fear that **once a person names a substitute decision maker in an advance directive they lose control of their own care.** The patient should understand that as long as he/she retains decision making capacity, he/she retains control of their medical destiny. Advance directives only become active when a person cannot speak for him or herself.

Need more information or help? Call 633-3400 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to get live help. Thank you for letting us help care for you and your loved ones.