

How To Be In Control When You Have No Control

Unconscious. Helpless. Your family is arguing. Arguing over what they think you would want. Then it occurs to them that what you want may not be good enough. One family member is very demanding, wanting every life-saving measure possible. One wants to respect your wishes but tells the doctor she does not understand “all that natural stuff she does”. Another one can do nothing but cry. A child has withdrawn.

The doctor and social worker tell it like it is. They want to know who among them is the *next of kin*, as you have no prior documentation of your medical care and life course wishes.

Does this scenerio scare you? It should. If you are reading this newsletter (and this article), then you have decided that you want to be actively involved in making the daily decisions and lifestyle choices that impact your health and well-being. The problem here is that, in American culture, you most surely will not receive the health care you want in this scenerio if you do not have your wishes in writing!

I know, you're thinking “I'm young. I'm healthy. I don't need to go this drastic just yet”. My point in writing this article is that, when we choose a healthier lifestyle and to practice alternative health strategies, we can't assume that our families and providers will be on the same page with us. You may not have a chronic illness that needs ongoing care and management, but you are still at risk for injuries and other unexpected illness.

Look at this. The Center for Disease Control reports that, in 2011, Americans made 136.3 million emergency room visits; 11.9 of these resulted in a hospital stay. If that's not enough, the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) reports that providers for the most part do not know if their patients practice complementary means unless their patients take the initiative to tell them.

It is this American emphasis on the hard sciences and advanced technologies that draws us to a complementary and integrative lifestyle. Scientific and technological advances and capabilities will continue, this along with the expectation that we will and should use them. Up and Away!

This is where I pause to encourage you to become more proactive, if you have not do so already. If you have never considered drawing an advanced directive, now is the time to consider.

In this brief article I will introduce you to several types of advance directives. When these are completed appropriately in your state of residence, your health providers will accept copies of them. Note that I am not an attorney and that this article is for informational purposes only.

Drawing an advanced directive is not something to be taken lightly. There is much to consider and, since it is difficult to be mindful of every important detail, it would be good to sit down with family,

especially those whom you want to assume responsibility for you and your affairs. This may be difficult but it will be better to do it together while you are still healthy and independent and while family are able to express any concerns about their ability to follow through with your wishes.

The beauty of an advance directive is that it allows you to remain in control even after you have lost control. Although someone else is providing the follow-through, they are following through with your wishes. For this reason, you should take pause before completing these documents to consider who you trust to carry out your wishes as you want.

Also, it is very important to talk to extended family and important others about you decisions as you complete and file these documents. You don't want any scenerios as was described here. Let each of your providers know and give each of them a copy.

Here is a brief explanation of each of the directives. You will not need all of them. Note the link at the end of the article provided by the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. There you will find a link to the documents for your state.

Laws and definitions vary from state to state. By definition, advance directives must be completed when you are still competent. Generally speaking, two physicians must come to agreement that you are incapacitated. In any case, it would be prudent to obtain a Notary signature and one witness signiture on the documents.

What An Advance Directive In *Not*:

Do not confuse an advance directive with a Last Will and Testament. This pertains to your wishes about your personal property. That is another matter entirely.

Living Will:

This allows you to specify your wishes for your health care and life course in the event you can no longer speak for yourself. It is in effect until time of your natural death. You can change it any time you decide to. This document allows you to spell out in your own words what you want and do not want. As noted, this must be completed while you are still competent.

Durable Power of Attorney:

This is your written authorization to grant a specific person to take care of your personal affairs in the event you are no longer able. It may be the case that your limitations are just physical and that you choose to have someone assist with your needs. This person becomes the *attorney-in-fact* and can manage personal matters, business matters, legal matters. The *attorney-in-fact* can be a family member, a friend, or a professional. It is advised that you choose this person carefully because they will be making decision on your behalf that may currently be unforeseen.

Health Care Power of Attorney:

This is your written authorization to grant a specific person to care for your end-of-life needs in the event you are not able to do so yourself. This person can be a family member or a friend. It may be the case that you do not want to make decisions yourself. It also allows your *attorney-in-fact* to make health care decisions on your behalf that may be unforeseen at the time you draw this document.

Mental Health Care Power of Attorney: This works much like the Health Care Power of Attorney but

specifically addresses mental health care needs. This is a relatively new document and is not available in all 50 states.

Springing Power of Attorney:

This works the same as the Durable Power of Attorney but does not go into effect until after you become incapacitated. You can document how you want your affairs taken care of, with the understanding that you will continue to live independently and in control for the time being. This one is not available in a 50 states.

Other Options:

An additional option to consider is wearing a medic alert bracelet. There are many styles available and different companies providing them. These can be as simple as just identifying your medical condition (in a few words) in the event that paramedics need to respond on your behalf. You can also opt for a monitoring program so that you may be able to reach paramedics with the touch of a button. This link is provided as an example but is not an endorsement for this specific brand.

<https://www.medicalert.org/user/add-on>

In summary, it is established that drawing our advanced directives is just another measure toward living the healthier lifestyle we seek. It is also well established that health care and technological advances will continue and that, in our American culture, we are expected to accept and to use these once they become available. To the extent that you want to exercise control over your lifestyle choices and outcomes, you should consider what you want and then discuss this with family and significant others.

References:

Center for Disease Control and Prevention

http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/ahcd/nhamcs_emergency/2011_ed_web_tables.pdf

Complementary and Alternative Medicine: What People Age 50 and Older Discuss with Their Health Care Provider. <https://nccih.nih.gov/research/statistics/2010>

Integrative Health and Medicine: Today's Answer To Affordable Healthcare

<http://www.ihpc.org/wp-content/uploads/IHPC-CE-Booklet-March2015.pdf>

Medic Alert <https://www.medicalert.org/user/add-on>

National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health <https://nccih.nih.gov/news/camstats>

National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization <http://www.caringinfo.org> Go here to complete an advanced directive.