

Consider the Myths

“Only old people need an advance directive.*”

No matter what the state of your present health, a change such as an accident or a serious illness could occur. Preparing for such a change is important for everyone, no matter how old or young, or how sick or well they may be. Talking about your preferences for future health care is a part of this preparation. What we think our loved ones want—and what they think we might want—is often wrong.

“My doctor, or my family, knows what I want.”

You may be right, but it would take the burden off them if you had a specific conversation about your decisions. Then, follow up with a copy of your advance directives that puts what you want into writing. A combination of talking and documenting is the best plan!

“Advance Care Planning costs a lot of money.”

Advance health care directives can be obtained free from health care providers and/or printed from the websites noted on page 26. You could pay an attorney to help you complete the forms, or get help from appropriately trained staff at your local physician’s office, hospital or hospice organization. There may be a small cost for a notary’s services, which are required on some advance directive forms. Ultimately, though, it is not a costly process.

“An advance health care directive* means I won’t get any more treatment.”

Advance Directives are not “no CPR*” orders. They allow you to decide how much or how little treatment you want in a wide range of medical situations. Putting your decisions in writing helps ensure that you get the kind of care and treatment you want.

“If I am going into hospice care*, I am going to die immediately.”

While hospice is designed for those who have six months or less to live if their illness continues on its current path, people often live longer than six months while receiving hospice care. Several studies have actually shown that patients receiving palliative care* and hospice live longer than nonhospice patients receiving more aggressive care.^{1,2}

“If I have a financial power of attorney*, I don’t need a health care power of attorney.*”

Most of the time these are separate legal documents.

“If I name someone as my health care agent,* I will lose control of my care.”

You have full control over your care until you lose decision-making ability*. Advance directives only go into effect when you can no longer speak for yourself.