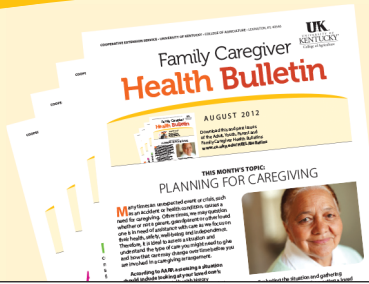


# Family Caregiver Health Bulletin



MAY 2015

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## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

# ADVANCED DIRECTIVES: PLANNING AHEAD

**P**lanning ahead, being aware and understanding your loved one's end-of-life decisions and wishes is an important part of caregiving. A living will or advanced directive is a written legal document that allows a person to record preferences and instructions for medical and end-of-life care if a time comes when they are no longer able to make decisions for themselves. The documents often describe a person's wishes regarding topics such as resuscitation, life quality and end-of-life treatments, including treatments that a person does not want to receive. Other decisions, including pain management and organ donation can also be documented.

Advance directives are not set in stone. They can be revised and



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# Discussing a person's end-of-life wishes with friends, family and healthcare providers is as important as documenting them.

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updated as often as a conscious and competent person wishes. They come into play when a person is too unconscious or ill to communicate or make decisions for themselves. As long as a person can make a competent decision, an advanced directive is not used and a person can accept or refuse medical treatment. It is important that family and health care providers are aware of the choices and that they stay informed when changes are made.

**According to the Mayo Clinic, when thinking about wishes and future medical care, it is important to:**

- Think about values and what constitutes life quality and meaningful existence
- Ask yourself whether or not you would want life extending treatment in any situation or only if a cure is possible
- Research various end-of-life care decisions, such as resuscitation, ventilation, feeding tubes, dialysis, antibiotic and antiviral medications, comfort care, or organ/body donation
- Share your thoughts with medical professionals, family and friends

## Durable power of attorney for health care

In addition to spelling out end-of-life wishes, Kentucky's living wills allow a person to designate a health care proxy or medical or health care power of attorney. This durable power of attorney for healthcare should be granted to someone who is trusted and who shares or is open to understanding one's medical care choices. Once designated, this person will be able to make medical decisions and use an advance directive to inform decision making. Because there may be unpredicted circumstances that an advance directive does not cover, a durable power of attorney for healthcare can also make decisions that do not contradict, but rather fill in the gaps for situations left uncovered.

In the state of Kentucky, one does not need a lawyer to draft a living will. A form and online packet can be downloaded from the Kentucky Office of

the Attorney General at <http://ag.ky.gov/civil/consumerprotection/livingwills/Documents/livingwillpacket.pdf> or one can be requested by calling (502) 696-5300 and sent by mail. A witness other than a relative, heir, guardian or health provider must be present when an advanced directive is signed. One such witness can include a notary public. If changes are made to the document, it is advised that an attorney is contacted. Copies of advanced directives should be made so that the individual and their durable power of attorney have one in a safe and accessible place and another should be placed in a person's medical record. Upon hospitalization, patients will be asked if they have an advanced directive. The Mayo Clinic recommends keeping a record of who has copies, in addition to carrying a wallet-sized card that states that a person has an advanced directive, where it is located and who is designated as the healthcare proxy.

Although a living will is not required by law, it is an important document because serious injury or illness cannot always be predicted. Advanced directives help people of all ages plan ahead and have a say in the type of life-saving measures and care they want to receive. Such documentation not only relieves family from major decision-making stress in times of crisis or grief, it also helps reduce possible confusion between family members about a person's wishes, and can help the family better understand the choices a person wants them to make on their behalf, especially if they do not agree or feel the same way.

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**Health Bulletin**

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