

ADVANCE HEALTHCARE DIRECTIVES

As a patient, you have the right to make healthcare decisions and plan now for your medical care if you are unable to speak for yourself in the future.

A federal law requires us to give you this information. We hope this information will help increase your control over your medical treatment.

♥ WHO DECIDES ABOUT MY TREATMENT?

Your doctors will give you information and advice about treatment. You have the right to choose. You can say “Yes” to treatments you want. You can say “No” to any treatment that you don’t want--even if the treatment might keep you alive longer.

♥ HOW DO I KNOW WHAT I WANT?

Your doctor must tell you about your medical condition and about what different treatments and pain management alternatives can do for you. Many treatments have “side effects.” Your doctor must offer you information about problems that medical treatment is likely to cause you.

Often, more than one treatment might help you, and people have different ideas about which is best. Your doctor can tell you which treatments are available to you, but your doctor can’t choose for you. That choice is yours to make and depends on what is important to you.

♥ CAN OTHER PEOPLE HELP WITH MY DECISIONS?

Yes. Patients often turn to their relatives and close friends for help in making medical decisions. These people can help you think about the choices you face. You can ask the doctors and nurses to talk with your relatives and friends. They can ask the doctors and nurses questions for you.

♥ CAN I CHOOSE A RELATIVE OR FRIEND TO MAKE HEALTHCARE DECISIONS FOR ME?

Yes. You may tell your doctor that you want someone else to make your healthcare decisions for you. Ask the doctor to list that person as your healthcare “surrogate” in your medical record. The surrogate’s control over your medical decisions is effective only during treatment for your current illness or injury or, if you are in a medical facility, until you leave the facility.

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♥ **WHAT IF I BECOME TOO SICK TO MAKE MY OWN HEALTHCARE DECISIONS?**

If you haven't named a surrogate, your doctor will ask your closest available relative or friend to help decide what is best for you, which often works. However, sometimes no one can agree on a course of action. That's why it is helpful if you can say in advance what you want to happen if you are unable to speak for yourself.

♥ **DO I HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL I AM SICK TO EXPRESS MY WISHES ABOUT HEALTHCARE?**

No. In fact, it is better to choose before you get very sick or have to go into a hospital, nursing home, or other healthcare facility. You can use an Advance Healthcare Directive to say *who* you want to speak for you and *what* kind of treatment you want. These documents are called "advance" because you prepare one before healthcare decisions need to be made. They are called "directives" because they state who will speak on your behalf and what should be done.

In California, the part of an Advance Directive you can use to appoint an agent to make healthcare decisions is called a Power of Attorney for Healthcare; the part where you can express what you want done is called an Individual Healthcare Instruction.

♥ **WHO CAN MAKE AN ADVANCE DIRECTIVE?**

You can as you do not need a lawyer if you are 18 years or older and are capable of making your own medical decisions.

♥ **WHO CAN I NAME AS AN AGENT?**

You may choose an adult relative or any other person you can trust to speak for you when your medical decisions must be made.

♥ **WHEN DOES MY AGENT BEGIN MAKING MY MEDICAL DECISIONS?**

Usually, a healthcare agent will make decisions only after you lose the ability to make them yourself. However, if you wish, you can state in the Power of Attorney for Healthcare that you want the agent to begin making decisions immediately.

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♥ **HOW DOES MY AGENT
KNOW WHAT I
WOULD WANT?**

After you choose your agent, talk to that person about what you want. Sometimes treatment decisions are hard to make, and it truly helps if your agent knows what you want. You can also write your wishes down in your Advance Directive.

♥ **WHAT IF YOU DON'T
WANT TO NAME
AN AGENT?**

You can still write out your wishes in your Advance Directive without naming an agent. You can say that you want to have your life continued as long as possible, or you can say that you would not want treatment to continue your life. Also, you can express your wishes about the use of pain relief or any other type of medical treatment.

♥ **WHAT IF YOU DON'T
WANT TO NAME
AN AGENT?**

Even if you have not filled out a written Individual Healthcare Instruction, you can discuss your wishes with your doctor and ask your doctor to list those wishes in your medical record. Or you can discuss your wishes with your family members or friends. It will be easier to follow your wishes if you write them down.

♥ **WHAT IF I CHANGE
MY MIND?**

You can change or cancel your Advance Directive at any time as long as you can communicate your wishes. To change the person you want to make your healthcare decisions, you must sign a statement or tell the doctor in charge of your care.

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♥ **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SOMEONE ELSE MAKES DECISIONS ABOUT MY TREATMENT?**

The same rules apply to anyone who makes healthcare decisions on your behalf--a healthcare agent, a surrogate whose name you gave to a doctor, or a person appointed by a court to make decisions for you--all are required to follow your Healthcare Instructions or, if none, your general wishes about treatment, including stopping treatment. If your treatment wishes are not known, the surrogate must try to determine what is in your best interest. The people providing your healthcare must follow the decisions of your agent or surrogate unless a requested treatment would be a bad medical practice or ineffective in helping you. If this causes disagreement that cannot be worked out, the provider must make a reasonable effort to find another healthcare provider to take over your treatment.

♥ **WILL I STILL BE TREATED IF I DON'T MAKE AN ADVANCE DIRECTIVE?**

Absolutely. You will still get medical treatment. We just want you to know that if you should become too sick to make decisions, someone else is able to make them for you.

♥ **REMEMBER THAT:**

A Power of Attorney for Healthcare lets you name an agent to make decisions for you. Your agent can make most medical decisions--not just those about life sustaining treatment--when you can't speak for yourself. You can also let your agent make decisions earlier, if you wish.

You could also create an Individual Healthcare Instruction by writing down your wishes about healthcare or by talking with your doctor and asking the doctor to record your wishes in your medical file. If you know when you would or would not want certain types of treatment, an Individual Healthcare Instruction provides a good way to make your wishes clear to your doctor and to anyone else who may be involved in deciding about treatment on your behalf.

These two types of Advance Healthcare Directives may be used together or separately.

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♥ HOW CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT FILLING OUT AN ADVANCE DIRECTIVE?

Ask your doctor, nurse, social worker, or healthcare provider to get more information for you. You can have a lawyer write an Advance Directive for you, or you can complete an Advance Directive by filling in the blanks of a form.

If you have completed an Advance Directive, please bring a copy with you to the hospital and provide it to the hospital registration staff. If you'd like further information and/or assistance in completing the forms, please contact Social Services at **(559)433-8093**. Copies of the Advance Healthcare Directive forms are available at Registration. If you have been a patient at the Fresno Heart & Surgical Hospital (formerly the Fresno Heart Hospital) before, you can submit your Advance Directive form at any time to the Health Information Department (Medical Records) and ask that the form be attached to your permanent medical record. It is a good idea to tell your family and/or friends that you have an Advance Directive on file at the hospital. If you've been a patient at more than one hospital, you should keep your Advance Directive on file at each hospital.

Alternatively, you may communicate your wishes to your physician or nurse by essentially providing verbal instruction as to your Advance Directive. It is important to recognize that if you choose to verbally discuss your wishes instead of putting them in writing; it is more likely that confusion about your preferences will ensue.