

**A PRACTICAL GUIDE
FOR
ADVANCE CARE PLANNING**

MAKING YOUR HEALTHCARE WISHES KNOWN



Developed in cooperation with:
Columbia St. Mary's Mission Services; and the
End-of-Life Coalition for Southeastern Wisconsin

Making Your Wishes Known

*The most precious gift we can offer is our presence.
When mindfulness embraces those we love, they will bloom like flowers.*

Thich Nhat Hanh

We often take for granted that when difficult decisions will have to be made regarding our future, we will be able to make those decisions ourselves. “No one wants to think of illness, disability or death until that time comes.” “No use worrying ourselves or our loved ones with such talk.” “Besides, I’m young and I’m not sick; I have time to wait to think about those things or to make these decisions.” Do any of these thoughts sound familiar? You are not alone.

Each year thousands of us are faced with making medical decisions for ourselves or for our loved ones. A common statement from those having to make such decisions is, “I wish I would have talked to ‘my loved one’ about this, so I would have known what she wanted.” As for ourselves, we may avoid uncomfortable discussions regarding our own wishes in an attempt to protect and care for those we love. Talking with someone about our wishes is in fact a loving thing to do.

Columbia St. Mary’s offers this guide designed to assist you in beginning to discuss your choices. We are ready to help you begin this journey, but you must take the first step. Take some time to review this booklet and start conversations with those around you. When you are ready, there are forms located in this packet with instructions to assist you. These forms will be a written declaration of your choices. Completing the Advance Care Planning process will provide you and your loved ones the *peace of mind* that your choices have been communicated, and your wishes are known.

What are Advance Directives?

Advance Directives are written instructions that state what your choices are regarding health care decisions. These written documents are guides for your physicians and loved ones in the event that you cannot speak for yourself. It is a way in which you can ensure that your beliefs and wishes are known. It takes the burden off of your loved ones, and gives your health care providers an understanding of how you want to be cared for at the end of life. The State of Wisconsin acknowledges two types of Advance Directives:

- **Power of Attorney for Health Care**
 1. Allows you to appoint one or more agents and gives them the legal authority to make health care decisions for you if you are unable to make those decisions for yourself.
 2. Sets guidelines for your healthcare agent(s) and physician(s) to honor your wishes for care.

3. This document may avoid guardianship proceedings while a Living Will may not be able to do this.
- **Living Will/Declaration to Physicians**
 1. States your preferences for life-sustaining care if you have a terminal condition (an incurable condition where providing life-sustaining measures would only prolong the dying process) or you are in a persistent vegetative state (PVS – an incurable condition where you lose the ability to think, speak, or have purposeful movement – only heart beat and breathing continue and there may be sleep/wake cycles present).
 2. Gives instructions to physicians **only** under the above circumstances.

Why do I need an Advance Directive?

Having an Advance Directive makes your wishes clear to your family, friends and health care providers. In Wisconsin, the law does not automatically authorize a family member to make health care decisions for you. Advance Directives help to ensure that your wishes will be honored even if you are too ill to speak for yourself. Having an Advance Directive may lessen the stress for your loved ones by directly answering healthcare questions specific to your care.

Can I change my mind later about my wishes?

Yes, these documents can change at any time or they can remain the same until your death. This is your document. You can make a simple change such as a contact phone number by simply changing the number on the form. But if you wish to amend the document it is best to do the following:

- Create a new document as soon as possible and make sure to date it (the most current document is the one considered valid by Wisconsin State Law). Discuss your amended wishes with your agent.
- Verbally express your intent to revoke the document in the presence of two witnesses. Make sure to notify your physician and your agent(s).
- Destroy the previous document or have someone else do so in your presence.

Who should be my Health Care Agent? Someone Who:

- Knows you well and understands your personal beliefs regarding medical treatment
- Is a responsible adult at least 18 years of age
- You can trust to carry out your wishes
- Is willing to be your agent
- Is not your healthcare provider, or an employee or spouse of your healthcare provider – unless they are also your relative

When does my agent start making decisions?

Your agent does not make decisions for you until you no longer can make decisions for yourself (incapacitated). It takes two physicians or a physician *and* a psychologist to declare that you are incapacitated.

Can my Financial Durable Power of Attorney make my health care decisions?

No, a financial durable power of attorney is specific to money and finances only, not healthcare.

Instructions for completing the document:

1. Read the entire document carefully.
2. Talk to your agent(s) about your health care preferences, religious beliefs and quality of life concerns.
3. If you have questions about any procedures, benefits or burdens discuss them with your healthcare provider so you understand your options and ask them if they can honor your wishes.
4. Ask the agent(s) if he or she will accept this responsibility.
5. Follow the instructions on the document.
6. If you need additional copies of the document, please feel free to make copies of the one provided, or print it from our website <http://www.columbia-stmarys.org/OPage.asp?PageID=OTH000194>

Signing the document: For the signing you and your two witnesses must be together.

1. Write legibly
2. Use blue or black ink
3. The Witness may **NOT** be:
 - a) Under 18 years of age
 - b) Your Health Care Agent
 - c) A person with a claim on your estate
 - d) A relative
 - e) A person directly financially responsible for your health care
 - f) Your health care provider
 - g) An employee of the health care facility where you are a patient or resident (unless he/she is a Social Worker or Chaplain).
4. In the presence of the witnesses, you should sign and date the form.
5. Have your witnesses sign and date the form.
6. If your agent(s) live elsewhere, you may mail it to them.
7. Make sure to date all documents to prevent confusion in case you choose to complete a future document

What to do with your Advance Directive once it is completed?

1. Keep the original in a safe place.
2. Give a copy to your physician(s) and discuss any final questions
3. Give a copy to your agent(s).
4. A photo or fax copy of your document is as legal as the original.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

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NOT AN END, BUT A BEGINNING . . .

After completing the steps to fill out the document and notifying the appropriate people, you may feel a great sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. You will have given your loved ones a great gift, the gift of knowing your wishes and the chance to celebrate your life.

Wishing you abundant health and happiness,

The Physicians and Staff of COLUMBIA ST. MARY'S