

Understanding Advance Healthcare Directives

Good advance planning for health care decisions is, in reality, a continuing conversation - about values, priorities, the meaning of one's life, and quality of life.

With the increasing ability of medical science to sustain our lives, people are living much longer than ever before. Unfortunately, as we grow older and experience poor health, we may find ourselves in a position where decisions need to be made as to how we wish to be treated in a variety of medical situations at the end of our lives. Further, sometimes we find ourselves in a condition where we can no longer express our preferences. **Advance health care directives** allow us to deal with these situations. Without such directives, your family may find it necessary to obtain court orders to deal with your medical situation.

By expressing such preferences in a **written legal document**, you are ensuring that your preferences are made known. Physicians prefer these documents because they provide a written expression from you as to your medical care and designate for the physician the person he or she should consult concerning unanswered medical questions. Rather than the physician having to obtain a consensus answer from your family as to your treatment, the physician knows your preferences and knows who you want to provide decisions when you cannot do so. Making your wishes known in advance prevents family members from making such choices at what is likely one of the most stressful times in their lives.

It is the policy of Meridian Center for Surgical Excellence, regardless of any advance directives or instructions from a health care surrogate or power of attorney, that an unexpected medical emergency, which occurs during treatment at this facility, will be aggressively managed with resuscitative or other stabilizing measures followed by emergency transfer to the closest emergency room. The receiving hospital will implement further treatment or withdrawal of treatment measures already begun in accordance with patient wishes, advance directive or health care power of attorney. Acknowledgement of this policy does not revoke or invalidate any current health care directive or health care power of attorney.

Resources to help you to create an Advance Directive

- This webpage, hosted by the U.S. Living Will Registry, provides a state-by-state list, with links to state specific websites that provide free advance directive forms

<http://www.uslivingwillregistry.com/forms.shtm>

- This webpage provided by the American Bar Association provides a great tool kit, which contains a variety of self-help worksheets, suggestions, and resources. There are 10 tools in all, each clearly labeled and user-friendly. The tool kit does not create a formal advance directive for you. Instead, it helps you do the much harder job of discovering, clarifying, and communicating what is important to you in the face of serious illness.

<http://www.abanet.org/aging/toolkit/home.html>