

ADVANCE DIRECTIVES FOR HEALTH CARE

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There are actually several documents related to making health care decisions for you in the event you are not in a mental state to be able to make those decisions for yourself. Let's explore these various documents.

Health Care Power of Attorney - The document may be very specific in types of treatment you desire for various circumstances or may be fairly general. The basic document will name the individuals you wish to make your health care decisions such as accepting treatment, rejecting treatment, selecting doctors, transferring from one facility to another, etc. Normally this becomes effective when one or two physicians state that you are not able to make your own health care decisions.

Living Will - The living will states that you desire that your life not be prolonged by life-sustaining procedures if you are terminally ill, permanently in a coma, suffer severe dementia, or are in a persistent vegetative state. This is often combined with the health care power of attorney or may be a stand-alone document and you may select between whether you wish to have artificial nutrition or hydration and whether you desire "extraordinary means" such as respirators be used to keep you alive in these circumstances.

These documents are available from an attorney and also widely available through hospitals, hospice and many other agencies. There is also a specific Psychiatric Health Care Directive strongly recommended for folks dealing with mental health issues. The law requires all of these forms to be signed in front of two witnesses who are not family members or health care providers and notarized. Your doctors like to have a copy of this form and you will always be asked if you have one if you have to go to the hospital for tests or treatment.

Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) - A DNR is a medical order signed by a doctor that states in the event of a cardiac and/or pulmonary arrest efforts at cardiopulmonary resuscitation should not be initiated.

Medical Order for Scope of Treatment (MOST) - This form includes whether or not to resuscitate but also goes into much more specific treatments to be accepted or rejected in a medical emergency (such as intubation, whether to transfer to hospital, use of antibiotics, etc.).

These two forms must be signed by a physician, physician assistant or nurse practitioner and the North Carolina General Statutes specify the form and color and it must be on the statutory form. Most folks will post these on their refrigerator.

As March Madness approaches and your favorite team underperforms you may want to make sure you have these health care directives in place -haha!