

“About six weeks ago, I fell and broke both of my legs. While my injuries were not life-threatening, I had peace of mind, because my husband and I completed our advance directives ten years ago. I ask other polio survivors ...”

ARE YOU PREPARED? **Advance Directives**

Debbie Hardy, Volunteer Editor, Whittier, California

Advance directives allow your voice to be heard if you are no longer able to speak for yourself. Signing one is personal and can be frightening. None of us wants to think about becoming incapacitated and no longer being able to make decisions for ourselves. But accidents happen every day, and we should be prepared. It is important to make these decisions while you are capable, so that there is no confusion regarding the medical treatment you prefer as you near the end of life.

Generally, two documents are completed: a living will and a medical power of attorney (durable power of attorney for health care).

Living Will Do not confuse a living will with a regular will. A living will *only* applies to and deals with issues regarding your health/medical care. It is a written statement that informs health care providers what type of life-prolonging treatments or procedures to perform or not to perform if you are in an irreversible medical state or have a terminal condition. A living will does not mean “do not treat” or withholding of pain medication. Its purpose is to express your wishes for medical treatment, and, if the situation necessitates, to die with dignity as you define it.

If you become incapacitated without a living will, someone else — your spouse, adult child or other family member — will be required to make these difficult

decisions. With your wishes in writing, it can be less confusing and agonizing for the significant people in your life.

Medical Power of Attorney Living wills cannot cover all situations. That is why you need a medical power of attorney or durable power of attorney for health care. It allows you to choose *any* person to make medical decisions for you and/or make certain that your wishes are carried out if you should become temporarily or permanently unable to make decisions for yourself. Be sure that the person you specify agrees to accept this responsibility, and discuss with him or her how you would like matters handled.

After completing your advance directives, make sure that your family and health care providers have a copy and/or know where it is kept.

During their lifetime, many people change their mind about their preferences regarding end-of-life and/or medical treatment. If capable, you may cancel or change your living will or medical power of attorney at any time, even if you are in the hospital. If you do so, provide all of the necessary people with the dated revised copy.

Advance directives allow you to make choices. If you do not have an advance directive and become unable to make decisions for yourself, you will be given full medical care appropriate for your condition.

You do not need an attorney to fill out forms for a living will and/or a medical power of attorney; however, you may wish to consult with one if you have any questions. ¹

ADVANCE DIRECTIVES are recognized in all 50 states and the District of Columbia as legally binding. But, be sure to check the special requirements in your state at www.partnershipforcaring.org/Advance/documents_set.html, or by calling Partnership for Caring at 800-989-9455, your local library, or hospital.