

► Making Health Care Decisions

In our society, you have the right to make decisions about your own health care. Because new developments have made it possible, at times, to prolong life beyond that which may be desired by a person, this right to decide has become increasingly important.

Health care choices should be considered before a crisis or severe illness, when there is time for discussion with one's family and physician. Individual wishes may be communicated by means of an Advance Directive for Health Care. This document, which states your preferences, becomes effective should you become unable to speak for yourself.

By Federal law, patients admitted to most health care facilities must be asked if they have completed an Advance Directive. If there is one, a copy should be included in your medical record.

For More Information

For further information about bioethics and patient rights, please call the following:

Morristown Memorial Hospital

(973) 971-5142

Overlook Hospital

(908) 522-2201

Bioethics Consultation: (908) 522-5329

Mountainside Hospital

(973) 429-6136

(973) 429-6298

You and Your Advance Directive for Health Care

- What is it?
- How is it used?
- Why is it important?



Morristown Memorial Hospital
Overlook Hospital, Summit
Mountainside Hospital, Montclair/Glen Ridge

www.atlantichealth.org

A partial view of the Atlantic Health System logo, showing the stylized 'A' icon and the word 'Atlantic'.

You and Your Advance Directive for Health Care

► The Importance of Advance Directives

If you ever become unable to make health care decisions, your family and caregivers need to know your values and wishes in order to make decisions on your behalf, as you would have made them. Putting your wishes in writing makes them clear and provides guidance for family members or others who may be required to speak for you. The law requires that health care providers honor your wishes as expressed in an Advance Directive.

► Definition of "Advance Directive"

An Advance Directive is a legal document allowing you to direct those making decisions for you if you become unable to speak for yourself. In New Jersey, an Advance Directive may be used to ask that any treatment, including life-supporting treatments (such as breathing machines, feeding tubes, medicines by vein, CPR, etc.), be accepted or refused.

► Types of Advance Directives

In New Jersey, there are three types of Advance Directives, any one or all of which may be used:

- **A Living Will** (also called an Instruction Directive) states what kinds of treatments you would accept or refuse and under what circumstances.
- **A Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care** (also called a Proxy Directive) lets you name a "health care representative" to make health care decisions on your behalf. (This is not the same as a durable power of attorney for financial matters and your doctor cannot

be your health care representative.) It is a good idea to name an alternative person in case the first person named is not available if needed.

- **A Combined Directive** includes both of the above. In most cases it is advisable to have a Combined Directive.

In New Jersey, anyone who is 18 years of age or older and is able to make reasoned decisions may complete an Advance Directive. There are a variety of forms available or you may write your own. You must sign and date the document in the presence of two adult witnesses or have your signature notarized. Consultation with an attorney is optional.

Organ Donation: It is a good idea to state in your Advance Directive your wishes about donation of organs and tissue, even if you carry an Organ Donation wallet card.

Sharing Your Advance Directive: It is very important to discuss your Advance Directive with your health care representative, your family, your doctor, and others who are close to you.

Where to Keep Your Advance Directive: Do not keep your only copy in a safe deposit box. You should give a copy to your health care representative, appropriate family members, your doctor, and/or others close to you. If you are admitted to a health care facility, a copy will be requested for your medical record.

Changing Your Mind: An Advance Directive can be changed or revoked at any time. If you change it or write a new one, however, be sure you give a copy to the appropriate people and void copies of the old one.

Following Your Advance Directive: New Jersey law states that Advance Directives are legal documents and must be followed, except for instructions that are prohibited by law.

If You Do Not Have an Advance Directive: Each person is treated according to his/her needs and wishes, if known, regardless of whether or not there is an Advance Directive.

Emergency Care and Advance Directives: All available emergency care will be provided until there is time to review any Advance Directive and the chances of recovery. At that time, if it is clear under the circumstances that you would not want treatments to continue, they may be stopped and further treatment may be withheld.

Following Advance Directives in Other States: Although laws differ, most states will abide by a valid Advance Directive written in another state. If you travel frequently, it is a good idea to have all signatures notarized, although notarization is not required in New Jersey. If you move to another state, you should review that state's requirements and revise your Advance Directive if necessary.

► Other Information and Resources

You can call your hospital's Patient Representative, Social Worker, or the Pastoral Care Department for advice and assistance. The Bioethics Committee periodically offers programs for the community and is available for presenting special programs on request. The committee also offers consultation services for hospitalized patients and their families, without charge, to assist them in resolving any issues or concerns which may arise.