

Advance Care Planning

Many people think that they have planned because they have a current will, and they have a person who is their power of attorney. We sometimes omit planning for advanced health care in the case of a medical emergency. It is sometimes difficult to talk with a loved one about what type of care they would want if they are seriously ill.

As a long-distance caregiver, you may want to wait until you are face to face with your parents, rather than trying to handle this sensitive topic over the phone. During a visit you could tell them that you have just made your will, or chosen someone to make your healthcare decisions. This is separate from a durable power of attorney for financial and legal matters. Although it may be the same person, you need to have a durable power of attorney for healthcare.

When talking about medical care, assure your parents that as long as they are alert, they will be the ones to make decisions. Healthcare providers cannot know your parents' preferences unless they are documented in their medical records. Having these wishes on the record allows your parents to receive the care they want and avoid conflicts when family members disagree over treatment decisions.

Advance care planning is often done through an advance directive, which includes verbal and written instructions about future medical care. There are two types of advance directives- a living will and a durable power of attorney for health care. A living will states in writing what kinds of life-sustaining medical treatment, if any, a person wants if he or she is unable to speak or respond and at risk of dying. A durable power of attorney for health care names someone to make those decisions in that same type of situation. This person, called the health care proxy, can decide on care based on what he or she knows the patient would want. It is vital for your parent to discuss their wishes with the healthcare proxy. State- by- state forms are available through the [US Living Will Registry](#).

Living nearby is not a requirement to be a healthcare proxy. Most people ask a close friend or family member to be their healthcare proxy. Some people turn to a trusted clergy or a lawyer. Whoever is chosen should be able to understand the treatment choices, know your parents' values, and support their decisions.

Advance directives are not set in stone. Let your parent know that they can revise and update their instructions as often as they wish. They can also change their power of attorney for healthcare agent. Keep your healthcare team informed of any changes. Consider giving copies of advance directives to all caregivers and to your brothers and sisters. Keep a copy at home as well. Because state laws vary, check with your Area Agency on Aging, your state department of aging, or a lawyer for more information.

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