

**What is a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care?**

This is a legal document in which you may give authority for making decisions about your healthcare to someone else. The documents are usually written so that this authority is given only if you become unable to make decisions yourself.

**Are there healthcare decisions you cannot delegate to someone else?**

Yes. These are therapies or other procedures which induce convulsions, surgery solely for the purpose of psychotherapy, amputation, and psychiatric or mental health procedures which intrude on your bodily integrity or physical freedom of movement.

**What does the Washington Natural Death Act say?**

The Washington Natural Death Act recognizes the right of all adults to control decisions about their own medical care. It allows adults to give written directions about withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining procedures in the event of a terminal condition. The law contains a sample *Directive to Physicians*, often called a *living will*. It is one way for you to make known your desires for medical treatment if your condition is terminal and you are unable to talk about them yourself.

**What does terminal condition mean?**

This is an incurable condition caused by injury, disease, or illness, where life-sustaining medical procedures serve only to postpone the moment of death. Withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining measures, except in special circumstances, is legal only if death is imminent. "Imminent" has never been precisely defined by a law or by the courts in Washington State, but this term is generally interpreted as meaning close to, or very near to death.

**What are the special circumstances?**

Washington courts have said that if it is the patient's wish, artificial life support can be withheld or withdrawn when a patient's physician and two other doctors agree he or she cannot recover from an unconscious and unresponsive condition.

**How do I prepare a living will or Directive to Physicians?**

A sample is included in state law, and forms are found in the Advance Directive packet which is available in Memorial Hospital's Registration Services. You must sign it in the presence of two witnesses who are not related to you and are not entitled to any portion of your estate. Your physician, the physician's employees and employees of your hospital or nursing home cannot be witnesses.

**How do I prepare a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care?**

Standard forms are available, but you should be sure to find one that meets your needs. The format and wording of *Durable Powers of Attorney* will depend on your

individual situation, so you may wish to consult an attorney. The document should be signed and notarized.

### **Can I change my advance directives?**

Yes, you may change or cancel either a Durable Power of Attorney or a Directive to Physicians at any time. You may do this by destroying the document, putting your change in writing or telling someone about the change. If you alter your directive, you should give new copies to your family, attorney, physician or others who may be involved. Your physician must know about the change or it will not be effective.

### **Where should I keep my advance directives?**

You and your family should agree on a safe place to keep Advance Directives, as you do with other important documents. You should give copies to your physician and your attorney. If you are being admitted to a hospital, take a copy with you.

### **What do doctors and hospitals think about advance directives?**

Doctors and hospitals support patient's actions to explain their desires for medical care. They honor Advance Directives that meet the requirements of state law and standards of medical ethics. If for matters of conscience, they cannot honor an Advance Directive, they are required by law to make an effort to transfer the patient to a physician or hospital that will.

### **Do I really need advance directives?**

There is no legal requirement. The decision to have or not have Advance Directives is a very personal one, but the best way to make your wishes known is to put them in writing. Some people find it comforting to have written directives, and think that it eases the burden of decision-making for family and friends.

Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital is dedicated to giving compassionate care. This includes acknowledging your right to information about your health status. If you have questions or concerns, consult your physician or members of our healthcare team.

For more information, call  
Memorial Hospital's Chaplain  
(509) 575-8035