

Article for Local Publications

Gifting Peace of Mind: Advance Directives help ensure you receive the care you want.

By Andrea Nagel

Nobody enjoys thinking about the “what-ifs” surrounding a potential medical crisis. But questions like, “Who would I want to take charge of my medical decisions if I couldn’t?” are important to consider. Taking time to put these wishes down on paper not only provides direction to medical staff, but it also takes pressure off your family members in what may be a stressful situation.

What are advance directives?

Advance directives are legal documents that can speak for you when you are unable to speak for yourself. The most common types of advance directives include do not resuscitate orders (also known as a DNR or POST form), living will, and durable power of attorney for health care (also known as a medical power of attorney). Together, these documents tell your family and care providers what your wishes are, who can help make medical decisions, and what your end-of-life care preferences are should that need to be addressed.

Who needs advance directives?

While it may seem like these documents cater to the chronically ill or those more susceptible to illness or injury, it is recommended that everyone be prepared. By planning ahead, you can get the care you want if you're incapacitated due to an accident or serious illness. An advance directive can make your preference clear. You'll spare your loved ones the stress of making decisions without your guidance.

“It’s important for everyone to have advance directives ready,” Nicole Pelly, M.D., Kootenai Clinic Palliative Care, said. “It’s especially important to have your Medical Power of Attorney established so somebody is able to make decisions on your behalf. Advance directives serve as a guide for your medical team to ensure your wishes are being followed even when you can’t express them yourself.”

To help ensure your loved ones are aware of your wishes, experts advise sitting down and having a conversation about your decisions, and provide copies of your advance directives to anyone who may be involved in your care.

How can I write an advance directive?

Your primary care doctor or specialist should be able to provide you with the correct forms, or you can write your wishes down yourself. You can also have a lawyer prepare them, or get a form from your local health department. The advance directive form is also available for you to download and complete at: **IdahoLivingAndDyingWell.org**.

“The best way to complete the advance directive is to discuss your end-of-life care wishes with your primary care provider using the advance directive forms,” said Jill Weeks, executive director of Kootenai Health Transitional Care Services. “Currently, there are 23 facilitators in the northern Idaho region who have been trained to help individuals start the conversation about end-of-life health care decisions and can provide guidance on completing an advance directive form.”

Recently, the North Idaho Palliative Care Coalition partnered with the Northwest Hospital Alliance to create a unified website for all advance directives, palliative care, and Hospice care

resources. This site, tailored to those living in the Idaho Panhandle, provides access to current forms, events, and other resources for both patients and health care professionals.

“We developed this site so we can have one location for resources from all five of our northern counties,” Dr. Pelly said. “We want to make it easy for our patients to make their wishes known. It helps us as caregivers and it helps their family make the right choices.”

If you have questions about your advance directives, meet with your primary care provider to discuss your questions, or contact an organization with trained advance care planning facilitators. You can find a complete list of local resources at **idaholivinganddyingwell.org**.