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**Press Release**

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## **Do You Have an Advance Directive?**

Do you know what healthcare treatments you would and would not want if you could not speak for yourself? Do other people know what your wishes are? The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual National Healthcare Decision Day will be held on Friday, April 16, 2010, a day for all people regardless of age or current health to be reminded of the importance of making their healthcare wishes known to loved ones and their care providers.

Everyone is encouraged to voice their wishes and take steps to ensure that their choices are known and protected. An Advance Directive is a legal document that tells healthcare providers who it is that you wish to make medical decisions for you and what treatments you would want or not want, if you are ever not able to tell care providers what you would want in a medical emergency or life-limiting illness. The simple act of creating an Advance Directive can turn out to be an incredible gift for loved ones in the event of an accident or severe illness.

Advance Directives are written instructions about your future medical care. They do not go into effect until you are no longer able to make decisions. Adults can benefit from thinking about what their healthcare choices would be if they were unable to speak for themselves.

### **Advance directives come in two main forms:**

A "**healthcare power of attorney**" (or "proxy" or "agent" or "surrogate") documents the person you select to be your voice for your healthcare decisions if you cannot speak for yourself. Your "healthcare power of attorney" will make medical decisions based on your wishes identified in your Advance Directive. In states that recognize these documents, families and healthcare providers cannot override your living will or your agent's decision. It is a good idea to discuss your wishes with your friends, family members, and your doctor, now, while you still can.

### **Your healthcare agent has to meet the following requirements:**

- Anyone over the age of 18
- Can be a family member, loved one, or close friend
- Someone who: you trust, knows you well, will advocate on your behalf, and will honor your wishes

A "**living will**" documents what kinds of medical treatments you would or would not want at the end of life. A living will is a type of advance directive called a healthcare treatment directive. A living will spells out the measures you do and do not wish to have taken to extend your life when

you are clearly dying. You may decide whether or not you would want breathing machines, feeding tubes, oxygen, IV fluids, or medicines to be used. A living will needs to be signed in front of a witness. A witness cannot be a relative, creditors and heirs to your estate, or your doctor. It is important that a living will cover decisions about your healthcare only when you have a terminal illness. It is better to prepare a living will when you are healthy, not when you have been ill or in the hospital.

Make sure your Advance Directive reflects your wishes. If you plan on moving to another state make sure you update your Advance Directive, because it may not be valid in the state that you move to. Some states do not recognize living wills that have been drafted in other states.

Your Advance Directive does not expire and can be updated as needed. It is important for your family members to know your wishes in case of an emergency. Also, you should take a copy of your Advance Directive to the hospital whenever you are admitted so that it can become a permanent part of your medical record.

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