

# Advance Health Care Directive

An advance health care directive is a legal document that will allow you to put down in writing your views on medical care so that your physician and family members know how to care for you in case of a crisis.

Specifically, completing an advance health care directive allows you to appoint someone to speak for you if you are unable to speak for yourself, and it allows you to write down your wishes about medical care and life support. Advance directive means "giving directions or advice in advance of a crisis." You may be more familiar with the term "durable power of attorney for health care" or a "living will."

We recommend that you fill out an Advance Directive form. These legal forms are easy to fill out and do not require a lawyer. However, the form will need to be witnessed or notarized. Completing an Advance Directive form allows you to appoint someone who can legally speak on your behalf with your point of view in mind. By writing down your views of life support and your wishes about medical care, the person you choose will know how to speak with medical personnel with your views in mind.

It is important to note that the advance health care directive can be used only if you are unable to speak for yourself. Also, it only covers health decisions. It does not cover financial decisions.

The most important consideration to think about before appointing an agent with an advance health care directive form is who you are going to ask to serve as your spokesperson. This person could be a family member, a good friend, or perhaps your clergyman. Of course, he or she should be someone that you trust to represent your views in the event of a crisis. But your spokesperson should also be capable of speaking clearly and assertively with medical personnel. Furthermore, he or she should be someone who lives near you and is unlikely to pass away before you do.

You may want to arrange to have a meeting with your loved ones so that you can talk about your views on medical care and life support. You'll want to discuss whether or not it's important for you to maintain independence and to be able to do things for yourself if you should become gravely ill. You'll also want to discuss your beliefs about illness and the dying process, such as how important it is for you to be comfortable, not to feel pain, or to have family members around. This kind of conversation will help your loved ones know what your personal views are. And talking about it will help you fill out your form.

An advance health care directive kit includes a four page form, instructions, and a wallet card. The instructions walk you through each section of the form and tell you what to write in the blanks. It also tells you what to do with the form when you have filled it out. You can pick up a copy of this form for free in the Health Education Center at any Kaiser Permanente facility.

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**For more health information ...**

- Connect to our Web site at *members.kp.org*
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult your doctor.