

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

PLANNING FOR YOUR LIFE

An advance care plan can be developed at any stage of life, whether you are sick or well.

Advance care planning is the process by which individuals make decisions about their future medical treatment and designate a surrogate decision-maker if they become unable to communicate their wishes and preferences later on. Advance directives can be developed at any stage of life, but for someone facing a chronic or terminal illness, advance care planning can improve quality of care and help the person avoid unnecessary suffering at the end of life.

While it's natural to put off difficult or unpleasant tasks, families who are proactive and make decisions related to aging and mortality - before a crisis hits - can prevent a great deal of stress and disagreement later on. The trick is tackling what may be delicate family issues even if everyone is healthy and doing well at the present moment. Advance care planning is especially important if an individual does not want aggressive medical treatment.



Elements of advance directives include:

- **Living will:** A living will provides instructions for health care providers as to when to use, withhold, or withdraw end-of-life medical care, such as being on a ventilator or feeding tube.
- **Durable power of attorney:** A durable power of attorney gives someone the power to handle financial and other matters. A durable power of attorney for health care, or health care proxy, refers to the legal designation of someone who will make medical decisions when the individual cannot do so. The person with durable power of attorney for health care can make treatment decisions beyond those listed in a living will. The authority to make medical decisions on a person's behalf is not included in a general power of attorney.

In addition to developing advance directives, communicating them to health care professionals is equally important. Advance directives can only work if the surrogate understands the individual's preferences, and health care providers are aware that the documents exist.

Almost every family will one day face difficult health care decisions for a loved one. The EAP can assist individuals and families with advance care planning, and offers resources for the preparation of necessary legal documents.