

# Focus On Advanced Directives

Living Healthy. Living Well.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I know what an advanced directive is?
- Do I have someone designated to make medical decisions for me if I am too ill or unable to do so?
- Do I know what a living will is?
- Do I know what a durable power of attorney is?

If you are not sure or do not know the answers to these questions,

**READ ON!**

Competent adults have the right to accept or refuse medical treatment after being informed of the procedures and risks. Many people are concerned about how medical decisions will be made for them in the future if they are unable to do so for themselves. Medical technology has provided us with many treatments that prolong life, and while some people want to take advantage of every procedure available, others do not. Many of these decisions must be made when the patient is not able to state what they do or do not want done.

Many people choose to state their health care choices in writing while they are able to do so. These legal documents are called advanced directives (decisions made in advance).

## **What is an Advanced Directive?**

An advanced directive is a document that states your health care choices and names someone to make those choices if you are unable.

Iowa law allows 2 types of advanced directives;

- Living Will
- Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care

Health care decisions can be made on your behalf by others in consultation with your physician without advanced directives. If you have executed advanced directives, you have greater assurance your wishes will be followed.

## **What is a Living Will?**

A living will is a document that directs your physician that certain life-sustaining procedures should be withheld or withdrawn if you are in a terminal condition and unable to decide for yourself. A living will only takes effect when you have a terminal condition and are unable to make decisions.

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

This is a document in which you have named another person to make health care decisions for you if you are unable. This person is required to make decisions according to your directions in the document, or make decisions in your best interest, if your wishes are not known.

A Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care differs from a general Power of Attorney in that it only covers your health care decisions. A general power of attorney is required for financial decisions and legal matters.

## How can you execute a Durable Power of Attorney or Living Will?

It is important to talk with the person you will designate to be your durable power of attorney so they will know what your wishes are. Your physician needs to know what your wishes are, as well.

These documents are available at the dialysis unit; the social worker will talk to you about these issues and answer your questions. The documents can be notarized or witnessed to be sure they become legal forms and will be kept in your permanent records. It is important to give all of your healthcare providers a copy of your advanced directives.

## Points to Remember...

- The dialysis social worker is a great resource for more information regarding advanced directives.
- It is a requirement for the dialysis staff to ask you if you have advanced directives and to assist you in execution of these documents, if you wish to do so.
- You may change your mind or revoke these documents at any time.
- It is important that your physician be informed of any changes made to your advanced directives.

## Questions?

Do you have a living will or durable power of attorney for health care? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_

Does the dialysis unit have a copy of your advanced directives? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_

Have advanced directives been discussed with you since you started dialysis?

Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_

Do you need assistance from the social worker about advanced directives? Yes\_\_\_\_No\_\_\_\_

Please take a moment to answer these TRUE/FALSE questions with your primary nurse.

- |  |      |       |
|--|------|-------|
| 1. Advanced directives will allow your caregivers to know what your wishes are regarding life-sustaining procedures. | TRUE | FALSE |
| 2. A durable power of attorney is the same as a general power of attorney.   | TRUE | FALSE |
| 3. The social worker is a good resource for information regarding advanced directives.                               | TRUE | FALSE |
| 4. It is a good idea for everyone, whether ill or not, to have advanced directives.                                  | TRUE | FALSE |