Advance Directives
(My Voice, My Choice)

Advance directives are a means for you to make choices about your health care. It is a way that you may accept or refuse medical treatment if you cannot speak for yourself. An advance directive gives you a way to express your wishes about treatment choices in the event that you cannot speak for yourself. These directives protect your right to make your own health care choices. Some examples of advance directives would be:

- A **living will** is a prepared document that designates your wishes in the event of a serious illness when you cannot care for yourself.

- A **patient advocate designation for health care** means you choose someone who knows your wishes and can speak for you, on your behalf, should you not be able to do so yourself. This is often a close friend or family member.
  - Think about what is important for you in your life. To what extent do you want machines to keep you alive? How much pain are you willing to accept?
  - Decide what types of life-sustaining treatments you would or would not want.
  - Name a person to be your advocate who understands all your wishes and is willing and able to carry them out.

- A **durable power of attorney for health care** is a formal legal agreement with an attorney or legal representative who will be bound to carry out your wishes in the event you are unable to care for or represent yourself. This should be someone you trust to make important medical decisions for you.

- **Do Not Resuscitate (DNR)** is a request to do nothing in the event your heart stops. A DNR order is used if you are very ill and not expected to recover. DNR orders are accepted by nearly all caregivers and hospitals.

Most caregiver's offices and hospitals have advance directive forms you can use. You may cancel or change these documents at any time. You must be mentally sound and able to communicate your wishes at the time you fill out these forms.

Regardless of how you let your final wishes be known in the event of a terminal illness, make sure you discuss them with your family and friends. Copies should be given to your caregiver, your hospital, your advocate or attorney, and to significant others. If you travel, you may want to find out what is legal and binding in the states where you will be. Laws vary from state to state.

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