



MATTHEWS INTERNAL MEDICINE

Advance Directive Frequently Asked Questions

What Is An Advance Directive?

An Advance Directive allows you to make your health care choices known in advance of an incapacitating illness. It is a legal document in which you state how you want to be treated in the event you become very ill and there is no reasonable hope for your recovery. Although laws vary from state to state in America, there are basically two kinds of directives:

1. **Living Will** is a legal document in which you state the kind of health care you want or don't want under certain circumstances.
2. **Health Care Proxy** (or Durable Health Care Power of Attorney) is a legal document in which you name someone close to you to make decisions about your health care in the event you become incapacitated.

What is a living will?

A Living Will (also known as an **Advance Directive/Health Care Directive**) specifies whether you would like to be kept on artificial life support if you become permanently unconscious or you are unable to communicate.

"Living Will" is an older term, and has been associated and limited to terminally ill patients. The newer term is Advance Directive.

A Living Will is one type of Advance Directive. It is a written, legal document that describes the kind of medical treatments or life-sustaining treatments you would want if you were seriously or terminally ill. A Living Will doesn't let you select someone to make decisions for you.

What is a Durable Power of Attorney?

A Durable Power of Attorney (**DPA**) for health care is another kind of **Advance Directive**. A DPA states whom you have chosen to make health care decisions for you when you're unable to make medical decisions for yourself. A DPA is generally more useful than a **Living Will**. But a DPA may not be a good choice if you don't have another person you trust to make these decisions for you.

You might also hear it referred to as a "**Health Care Proxy**" or a "**Medical Power of Attorney**". It names someone who "stands in your shoes" and communicates with your doctors on what your wishes are for end of life care. It is a document, signed by a competent adult, designating a person that you trust to make health care decisions on your behalf should you be unable to make such decisions.

Living Wills and DPAs are legal in most states. Even if they aren't officially recognized by the law in your state, they can still guide your loved ones and the doctor if you are unable to make decisions about your medical care. Ask your doctor, lawyer or state representative about the law in your state.

What is a Do Not Resuscitate order?

A Do Not Resuscitate (**DNR**) order is another kind of Advance Directive. A DNR is a request not to have cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) if your heart stops or if you stop breathing. (Unless given other instructions, hospital staff will try to help all patients whose heart has stopped or who have stopped breathing.) You can use an Advance Directive form or tell your doctor that you don't want to be resuscitated. In this case, a DNR order is put in your medical chart by your doctor. DNR orders are accepted by doctors and hospitals in all states.