

ADVANCE MEDICAL DIRECTIVES

(LIVING WILL, POWER OF ATTORNEY, AND HEALTH CARE PROXY)

Advance Directives—The term “Advance Directives” refers to treatment preferences and the designation of a surrogate decision maker in the event that a person should become unable to make medical decisions on her or his own behalf.

Advance Directives fall into three categories:

Living Will: This is a written document that specifies what types of medical treatment are desired should the individual become incapacitated. A living will can be general or very specific. The most common statement in a living will is to the effect that:

If I suffer an incurable, irreversible illness, disease, or condition and my attending physician determines that my condition is terminal, I direct that life-sustaining measures that would serve only to prolong my dying be withheld or discontinued.

More specific living wills may include information regarding an individual's desire for such services such as analgesia (pain relief), antibiotics, hydration, feeding, CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) and the use of life-support equipment including ventilators.

Health Care Proxy: This is a legal document in which an individual designates another person to make health care decisions if he or she is rendered incapable of making their wishes known. The health care proxy has, in essence, the same rights to request or refuse treatment that the individual would have if capable of making and communicating decisions.

Durable Power of Attorney: Through this type of advance directive, an individual executes legal documents, which provide the power of attorney to others in the case of an incapacitating medical condition. The durable power of attorney allows an individual to make bank transactions, sign Social Security checks, apply for disability, or simply write checks to pay the utility bill while an individual is medically incapacitated.