

What is an Advance Directive?

An Advance Directive is a written document, prepared and signed by you in accordance with Alabama law, which tells your attending physician(s) whether to provide, withhold, or withdraw life sustaining treatment (ventilator, renal dialysis and/or cardiopulmonary resuscitation [CPR]) and/or artificially provided nutrition and hydration and/or to designate a health care proxy to make those decisions on your behalf should you be determined, by two (2) physicians, to have an eminently terminal condition and you are permanently unconscious or mentally/physically unable to make your wishes known. You must be at least nineteen (19) years of age to formulate an Advanced Directive. You do not need an attorney but you should discuss your decisions with your primary physician and your family.

Types of Advance Directives

Alabama recognizes three (3) forms of Advance Directives. These are:

1. A Living Will is a written document that basically complies with the format set forth in Section 22-8A-4 of the Code of Alabama. A Living Will form is available from the hospital.

2. A Health Care Proxy is a person, designated in writing by you, who is given the power to make decisions regarding the provision, withholding, or withdrawal of life sustaining treatment and artificially provided nutrition and hydration should you be determined to face eminent death and you are unable to make your wishes known.

3. A Durable Power of Attorney may be used to empower a named individual to make medical decisions for you at any time when you are unable to make those decisions, due to unconsciousness, illness or injury. A Durable Power of Attorney may also contain language identical to that for a Health Care Proxy, which would allow the designated person to make the same end-of-life decisions, that the Proxy can be empowered to make.

Why should you have a Written Advance Directive?

If you know what you want done for and to you should you be facing eminent death, then an Advance Directive assures that your wishes are known and that they can be followed. Having this information available lifts the burden from your spouse and/or family of having to make those decisions at that difficult time.

How do you make an Advance Directive?

You may tell your physician, a nurse, or a hospital chaplain that you wish to make an Advance Directive. They can provide you with an approved Living Will / Health Care Proxy form. The chaplains can offer assistance with questions you may have. For a Durable Power of Attorney, you are best served by having an attorney assist you in its creation as you may wish to have the person selected to have additional powers regarding your personal and/or financial matters.

You may also advise your attending physician of your wishes, if you are able at that time.

What to do with your Advance Directive

If you have an Advance Directive, you need to have copies of it available to bring with you each time you are hospitalized. A copy should be provided to your primary care physician and to your family. If no family exists or is not readily available, you may wish to give a copy to a close personal friend whom you trust.

How do you change your Advance Directive?

You may change the terms of or terminate your Advance Directive at any time. You can mark through and sign specific parts you wish to remove/change or you can verbally change it providing you are deemed capable of understanding your decision.

Baptist Health Policy on Patient Decision Making

Adult patients who are deemed to possess the capacity to understand the outcomes and impact of their decisions, have the right to refuse care and treatment. This includes the right to make or not make an Advance Directive. If we (the hospital and your attending physician[s]) cannot carry out your wishes, we will tell you why and you will have the option to find another hospital and other physicians who will honor your requests.