



Kidney Q&A

4-12 months

Life Options Rehabilitation Program

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www.lifeoptions.org

Q: What are “advance directives” and do I need them?

A: Who would make your health decisions if you could not? An *advance directive* tells your care team what you want if you have a serious medical problem and can't talk to them yourself. Every adult should have one. An advance directive can help your family follow your wishes if you become very ill. It can also allow you to appoint someone to make medical decisions for you.

There are two types of advance directives:

- A **living will** states what treatments you would and would not want under certain conditions. You might decide when or if you would want a feeding tube or a respirator, for example.
- A **durable power of attorney for health care** names an agent you trust to make health decisions for you if you can't. Choose an agent you know very well, and explain your wishes, so he or she knows what you would want done.

It is in your best interest to have both. A living will tells your agent what you want, so he or she can make good decisions for you. If you don't have an agent or your agent can't be reached, your doctor can read your living will and use it to guide your treatment.

Give out copies: Once you make an advance directive, give a copy to your care team, your agent, and your family. Keep the original in a safe place, with a list of everyone who has a

copy. You can change an advance directive at any time, and give everyone a new copy.

What I can do to plan for future care if I can't make my own decisions:

- Think about my wishes and fill out an advance directive.
- Discuss my wishes with my family, close friend, and health care providers. Assure that my agent knows of my wishes and will abide by them.
- Make copies to give to care providers and my agent, and keep them in a safe place that is easy to get to (not my safe deposit box).
- If I change my advance directive, take back the old copies and destroy them.
- Call the National Kidney Foundation (800) 622-9010 for a copy of their advance directives brochure or visit www.kidney.org.
- Call the Partnership for Caring at (800) 989-9455 for information about advance directives, grief and loss, forms for each state, etc. or visit www.partnershipforcaring.org/HomePage/.
- Visit module 14 of Kidney School™: *Rights and Responsibilities* at www.kidneyschool.org to learn more about advance directives.