



NATIONAL HEALTHCARE DECISIONS DAY

★ *your decisions matter* ★

Death and Taxes

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April 15th looms as tax day. April 16, ironically, is National Healthcare Decisions Day, designed to ensure that all adults with decision-making capacity have the information and opportunity to communicate and document their healthcare wishes. In plain language, that means *your* deciding how *you* want to die!!

Of course we can never totally control how death comes to us, but as a hospice RN, I saw too many families torn apart by a lack of thinking about, and planning for, the inevitable end of this life. That's why I am committed to encouraging everyone over 18 to have conversations with their loved ones, to write their advance directive for healthcare (AD), and to distribute copies to everyone who might be involved when that time comes.

I work with Tomorrow's Choices, a volunteer organization. We hold free workshops at libraries and churches that provide the information necessary to complete your AD. You don't need a lawyer. You only need two witnesses (who won't benefit from your will) and who can say that you are the competent signer.

Our workshops cover such issues as our death-phobic society, how to write the AD, and who may be best able to make competent decisions on your behalf. When you name an agent and alternates, sometimes your spouse or child isn't the best choice, because it is too hard for them to deal with such an emotional situation.

Who do you want with you when you die? Where do you want to be? At home? In a hospital? Do you want hospice involved? Would you want CPR? What would you want done if you had dementia and could no longer feed yourself? When is a good time to think about palliative care? These are all choices you need to make – or someone else will make them for you!

The Advance Directive contains a Living Will, where you choose what life prolonging efforts and procedures you would want, and those you would not want, when you come to the end of your life. We present videos, pictures and graphs showing various possibilities to help you decide what you think would work best for you.

For instance – despite what you may have seen on TV – did you know that when CPR is performed, 49% of people die during the effort? That another 41% die before they can go home? And, of the 10% who do go to a care center or home, almost all have reduced mental capacity because if CPR is not started within 6 minutes of the heart's stopping, the brain begins to die, and does not recover from the lack of oxygen.

Furthermore, did you know that a survey of doctors shows that 75 to 90% of them would not choose to have CPR, artificial ventilation, dialysis, chemotherapy or many other treatments toward the end of their own lives? However, over 80% of them would want pain medication to ease their suffering.

In choosing what kinds of care you would want, and talking about those choices with friends and family, you give your agents the information they need to know should you come to a point where you cannot speak for yourself and their services are required.

Completing your advance directive is the greatest gift you can give your family, friends, and medical providers. For more information about Advance Directives, plan to join your neighbors at a Tomorrow's Choices workshop. Upcoming locations are listed on this website, along with many other resources.

Don't let another National Healthcare Decisions Day pass without putting your wishes in writing and having conversations with the people that matter to you.