

Recognized Advance Directive Forms Simplify Health Care Planning

Q.: When I went into the hospital for surgery recently, I was asked if I had any "advance directives." What, exactly, are advance directives?

A.: Advance directives are written documents, signed by you, and properly witnessed or notarized, that communicate your health care instructions to doctors and others only when you cannot speak for yourself. Advance directives are set forth in a Health Care Power of Attorney and a Living Will. An anatomical gift can be made as a part of these documents or such instructions can be set forth in a separate Organ and Tissue Donation form. Anatomical gifts can be registered with the Bureau of Motor Vehicles. Another type of advance directive, called a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) Order, is for use in limited situations and is completed by a doctor or other appropriate health care professional.

Q.: Why are there so many different advance directives? Do I need to have all of them?

A.: Each document has a different purpose, so, depending upon your situation, you may wish to have more than one. For example, a Living Will tells health care professionals the kind of care you would want if you could not make your wishes known and you were terminally ill or permanently unconscious. A Health Care Power of Attorney allows you to name someone to make health care decisions for you if you become unable to do so. Through an Organ and Tissue Donation form (or incorporating such desires in another document), you can provide for an anatomical gift of organs and tissue for transplantation, therapy, research, education or advancement of medical or dental science. A DNR order is written in your medical records; it allows you and your doctor to provide instructions about your end-of-life treatment, including circumstances under which you would not want to be resuscitated.

Q.: If I have old advance directives, are they still valid?

A.: As long as the required legal language is included in your advance directives, the older forms are still valid. However, if it has been a while since you last

reviewed your advance directives, you may want to consult your attorney to make sure that your wishes are still accurately reflected.

Q.: Where can I get the forms?

A.: Your attorney will have the forms and can help you tailor them to meet your specific needs. Also, you may obtain a copy of these forms by mailing a request along with \$3 to the Ohio Hospice & Palliative Care Organization, 555 Metro Place N, Ste. 650, Dublin, OH 43017, or by visiting that organization's Web site at <http://www.ohpco.org>.

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Law You Can Use is a weekly consumer legal information column provided by the Ohio State Bar Association. This article was prepared by Alan S. Acker, a Columbus attorney and chair of the Advance Directives Committee responsible for preparing the 2001 forms.

Articles appearing in this column are intended to provide broad, general information about the law. Before applying this information to a specific legal problem, readers are urged to seek advice from an attorney.

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