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Planning assists with end-of-life medical care

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It's not easy to think about, but planning ahead for medical treatment should you become incapacitated due to serious illness, injury or advanced age can give you more control over your medical care and ease the burden of decision making on your family, said Dr. John Zipperer, hospitalist for Banner Churchill Community Hospital.

"Documents called advance directives let you do just that. Instead of having other people make healthcare decisions for you, these documents give you the opportunity to make them in advance."

A health care declaration, also known as a living will, indicates the type of care you want or don't want if you're unable to give instructions. A durable power of attorney for health care, or proxy, designates someone you trust to direct your care. Ideally, it's best to use both forms. Having a proxy promotes flexible decision making, while a living will reassures the proxy that he or she is following your wishes.

Another document known as a do-not-resuscitate (DNR) order can supplement other directives, indicating that you do not want cardiopulmonary resuscitation in the event of heart or lung failure.

Make your wishes known

In addition to making all of your health care providers aware of your wishes, you should ensure that your proxy and family both know - and more importantly, understand - your wishes. If a family member strongly disagrees with your advance directive, he or she can basically make that null and void. Keep originals of your directives safe but accessible, and provide copies to your proxy, alternate proxy and all of your physicians and other health care providers. Discuss with your doctor, lawyer or state representative those laws applicable in your state. In other words, get as much information as possible to make an informed decision that's best for you.

Where to start

Making end-of-life decisions before an emergency or illness occurs will allow you to be directly involved in your own medical treatment. Consider the following resources for advance directive forms.

- Banner Churchill Community Hospital, 775- 423-3151
- Churchill County Senior Center , 775-423-7096



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