

Resources

The Catholic Health Association of Canada (CHAC) encourages you to reflect on end-of-life treatment issues and to discuss these matters with your loved ones. The following resources may be of assistance.

Making Choices about Healthcare: Advance Directives & Durable Power of Attorney, produced by the Catholic Health Association of Canada.

A 12-minute video that clarifies the pros and cons of advance directives and durable power of attorney in the context of Gospel values.

Statement on Advance Directives: My choice for care when I am seriously ill, a pamphlet produced by the Catholic Health Association of Manitoba, 151 Despina, Winnipeg MB R2H 0L7.

The most frequently asked questions about advance directives are addressed in this pamphlet. Sample directives are included.

Living Will, University of Toronto, Centre for Bioethics, 88 College St., Toronto ON M5G 1L4.

This 29-page booklet is especially helpful in providing descriptions of a variety of health situations in which a living will might be needed. A sample living will is provided.

For more information about the CHAC and its services contact:



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ADVANCE DIRECTIVES

Planning Ahead for End-of-Life Healthcare Decisions

Mr. Gray, aged 76, suffers from lung cancer. In spite of radiation treatments, his condition continues to deteriorate. One morning he collapses at home and is rushed to the hospital where doctors determine he has suffered a severe debilitating stroke.

In keeping with the hospital's policies, the healthcare team approaches Mrs. Gray and her son to ask whether Mr. Gray ever expressed any instructions regarding his treatment, and about being resuscitated, should his heart stop in such a condition.

Although this is the type of crisis we all hope we will never have to face, these situations do occur — often at a time we do not expect.



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The importance of talking

Mr. Gray's story shows how important it is to talk with family members and caregivers to express our feelings about healthcare and life-sustaining treatment before crisis situations arise. That way we can provide direction for family and caregivers if we are unable to speak or otherwise express our decisions.



Respect for life

Dying is one of the most important moments of our lives and it deserves thoughtful consideration. Our reflection on death begins with a belief in the sanctity of life. Life is a gift lived in relationship with a loving God. We share a responsibility within the human community to respect and nurture this gift. We need to take those measures for preserving life that offer a reasonable hope of benefit. However, we do not need to seek medical procedures when the burdens of such treatments outweigh the benefits hoped for or obtained.

As we do in most important decisions, we should seek the advice of others in deciding how to live while we're dying. We also need to let others know what we will require in order to live as fully as possible until we die.



What is an advance directive?

An advance directive is a document that is intended to instruct or inform others concerning the type of life-sustaining treatment you want should you lose your decision-making capacity or be unable to make your wishes known. There are two types of advance directives:

Instruction directives

Instruction directives, such as living wills, are written documents that focus on the life-sustaining treatment you would want in various medical situations.

Proxy directives

In a proxy directive, such as a durable power of attorney for healthcare, you appoint someone who will make healthcare decisions on your behalf if you can no longer do so.



Are advance directives legal?

Several provinces have passed laws recognizing advance directives. Some of these laws recognize proxy directives only, while others recognize both proxy and instruction directives. Other provinces will probably pass similar laws in the future. If you wish to prepare a directive, you are encouraged to inquire about requirements in your province to ensure that your advance directive is legally valid.



If you choose to prepare an advance directive, remember...

- ▶ An advance directive does **not** replace talking with people.
- ▶ It is extremely difficult to anticipate the many health situations we might confront in the future. It is equally difficult to project how we would feel and what we would want in such situations.
- ▶ Instruction directives that are unclear can be problematic.
- ▶ You can change your instructions or the person you wish to act as your proxy at any time. It is a good idea to review and discuss your directive as often as necessary.
- ▶ Give copies of your directive to your proxy, doctor, and family members.
- ▶ You do not need a lawyer to complete your advance directive. However, a lawyer can give you more specific information about laws regarding advance directives in your province.
- ▶ A decision to forego life-sustaining treatment does not mean you will cease to receive medical care. Canada is viewed as an international pioneer in palliative care. Palliative care strives to decrease suffering and to enhance physical, emotional and spiritual life when a person is nearing death.



If you choose not to prepare an advance directive, remember...

- ▶ That does not mean you will receive inappropriate care or be treated contrary to your wishes. The basic principle of healthcare is respect for the value and dignity of each person.
- ▶ You still have the right to discuss your health situation and treatment options with your doctor and to make decisions about the type of care you will receive. This includes the right to refuse non-beneficial treatment when death is clearly imminent and inevitable.
- ▶ Should you be incapable of making healthcare decisions, the healthcare team will still consult with your family about treatment decisions. The tradition of consultation between healthcare team and family still works.
- ▶ For this reason, if you choose not to prepare an instruction directive or to formally designate a proxy, it is important that your spouse or family members understand your wishes.
- ▶ Discussing these issues requires sensitivity and compassion. People can become quite alarmed when asked to confront issues related to terminal illness. A number of conversations may be required.