

St. Mary's Church

Stewardship of the Body

"I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made" (Ps. 139)

Health Care Directives

What is a health care directive? A health care directive (or advance directive) is any statement made by a person in advance that gives directions to decision makers and care givers regarding health care decisions to be made in the event the person loses the capacity to make those decisions for him/herself.

Who should have a health care directive? Everyone over the age of 18 is eligible to have a health care directive and should consider having one. Certainly, older people should consider having one.

Are health care directives legal? Health care directives that are properly prepared, signed and witnessed are considered legal documents. Generally, an attorney is not needed to complete one; however, in order to be "legal", specific criteria required for the health care directive must be met.

Is there a form to use in making a health care directive? The states of North Dakota and Minnesota (as well as most states) have standardized forms approved by the state legislature that are recommended to be used. Also, the Catholic Diocese has a standard form that it recommends to Catholics.

Can a person make out a health care directive by him/herself? Although anyone can draft a health care directive by oneself, it is strongly recommended that it be discussed with family members, the decision maker who will be appointed, as well as with a person's personal physician before finalizing it.

Is a health care directive the same as a living will? A health care directive is a newer term for what used to be called a "living will". The current health care directive is broader than the original living wills were. The current form includes a section that includes a power of attorney by which a decision maker (or health care agent) can be appointed, as well as a section to state one's wishes regarding health care decisions to be made.

When I go to the hospital, why do they ask if I have a health care directive? The Patient Self-Determination Act passed by the U.S. Congress requires that all hospitals, nursing homes, home care agencies, and hospices ask patients on admission if they have an advance directive. If they have one, a copy must be on their record. If they do not have one, they must be offered the opportunity to develop one.

There will be an opportunity to hear more about health care directives and have these and more questions answered, as well as to obtain the recommended forms on:

Sunday, March 8th from 9:30 to 10:15 a.m. in the church cafeteria.

Fr. Bernie Schneider, Catholic Chaplain at Altru Health System, will be here to give a presentation and answer questions about health care directives between the masses that Sunday.

Virginia Esslinger, RN, Parish Nurse