SUMMARY OF OUR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Cleveland Clinic Indian River Hospital’s policy is to honor a patient’s advance directive if it meets the requirements of state laws. We also recognize the right of patients to accept or reject medical or surgical treatment, to the extent permitted by law.

Additionally, it is our policy to provide you with written information regarding advance directives. This brochure is part of that information process.

Upon your admission, our staff will ask you whether you have signed an advance directive and document your response in your medical record.

If you have already signed an advance directive, you will be asked to provide copies for your medical record. If you have signed a valid advance directive, your wishes for treatment will be respected.

If you have not signed an advance directive but desire to do so, please let someone on our staff know.

Whether or not you have signed an advance directive, you will receive the same medical treatment from the hospital.

Introduction to the Advance Directive - Living Will

In the state of Florida, every competent adult has, in most cases, the freedom to accept or refuse medical treatment. When you are mentally competent and able to speak, you can exercise these rights by talking to your physician and family members to make them aware of your wishes. However, severe illness or accident could cause you to be unable to communicate your choices.

During that time, important decisions about your medical care may have to be made. Unless you leave written instructions, your family and physicians may have to guess about what kinds of treatments you would want. In some cases, they may be forced to proceed with treatments that they know you would not desire simply because your preference has not been expressed in writing. You can help your family and physicians by telling them in advance what you would want done under certain circumstances.

This planning ahead for future healthcare decisions is known as “advance directives.” Your directive goes into effect only if you become mentally incompetent and are therefore unable to express your wishes. You can also change these directives at any time up until that point.

You also may choose a person to act as your healthcare surrogate to make decisions concerning your medical care if you are unable to do so. Your surrogate is obligated to make the choices he or she believes that you would make if you were able to.

You are encouraged to complete both the living will, which would be an expression of your advance directive, as well as the appointment of a healthcare surrogate since not every possible situation may be addressed by your living will.

Before you complete an advance directive-living will, talk to your family, friends, physician, lawyer or spiritual adviser. If you choose to designate a surrogate, discuss your directions with him or her to ensure he or she can accept the responsibility since that person may someday be called upon to make decisions on your behalf. After you complete an advance directive-living will or designation of healthcare surrogate, give a copy to your regular physicians, healthcare surrogate, and trusted family members or friends. The hospital will place a copy in your medical chart. You will need to keep the original.
ADVANCE DIRECTIVES

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT

What is an advance directive?
It is any instruction you give relating to the provision of healthcare in the event you become unable to make your own decisions. Examples of advance directives include living wills and appointment of a healthcare surrogate. Using a directive, you give specific instructions about your healthcare in certain situations, or designate a person to act on your behalf in decision making, or a combination of the two.

What is a persistent vegetative state?
This term refers to a condition caused by a brain injury. The victim is unable to respond to his or her surroundings and is not aware of anything, even though the eyes may open periodically. It is similar to a coma in that the person is unresponsive, but it is a permanent condition. A head injury, stroke or other event may result in this condition and a person may be kept alive indefinitely in this condition by artificial means.

What is an “end-stage” condition?
This term refers to an irreversible condition that is caused by injury, disease or illness which has resulted in progressively severe and permanent deterioration and which, to a reasonable degree of medical probability, treatment of the condition would be ineffective.

What is a terminal condition?
The term refers to a condition caused by injury, disease or illness from which there is no reasonable medical probability of recovery and which, without treatment, can be expected to cause death.

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What is a healthcare surrogate?
A healthcare surrogate is a trusted and special person you choose to make healthcare decisions for you if you are not able to do so for yourself. Your surrogate should be someone who knows your wishes and who will make decisions based on what he/she believes you would want, not based on his or her own preferences.

May I change my advance directive?
Yes, you may do so at any time. If you do make changes to any advance directive, be sure to destroy all of the outdated copies and provide copies of the updated version to the appropriate people. Your most recently dated advanced directive will supersede previously executed documents.

Will my advance directive be honored in an emergency?
Usually it is not possible to determine the chances of survival in an emergency situation or to determine the outlook for recovery. After the initial emergency has passed and the prognosis for recovery is known, your advance directive will come into play if you are not able to express your wishes. Emergency medical service (EMS) personnel must take heroic actions in an emergency situation. The only exception to the above is when you and your physician have completed the State of Florida DNR Form.

Is it difficult to stop a treatment once it has been started?
No, not if you have an advance directive and your instructions are clear. Particularly in conditions with a sudden onset, it may take days or even weeks before the prognosis is known to a reasonable degree of certainty. During the time before the outlook is known, it is appropriate to use any treatments which might be beneficial. When the prognosis is established, if your instructions indicate you would not want continued treatment under the circumstances, treatment can be stopped.

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May I request that I not be given food and water artificially?
Your right to make choices includes the ability to choose not to be given food and water artificially, even if withholding this treatment shortens your life.

Are there any limitations on carrying out instructions in my directive if I am pregnant?
Yes. Most likely any instructions which would result in withholding or withdrawing life-prolonging treatments would not be honored during the time you are pregnant.

What about my religious beliefs?
Some choices you may make in filling out an advance directive may not be in keeping with the teachings of your religion. If this is a concern to you, discuss the matter with your minister, priest, rabbi or other spiritual adviser.

Do I need a lawyer or a notary to complete an advance directive?
In most cases, no; the document need only be signed in the presence of two witnesses. One of the witnesses must be someone who is not your spouse, blood relative, heir or person responsible for paying your medical bills. However, if you have any questions concerning the legal effects of these documents or any other aspect of this matter, you should contact your attorney.

After I complete an advance directive, what do I do with it?
Give copies to someone who would know if you became seriously ill. You may also want to consider giving a copy to your physician, minister, family members or close friends. Discuss with them the details of your directive and ask that they keep a copy to make available if it is ever needed. Of course you should give a copy to your healthcare surrogate, if you appoint one.