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An Apple a Day...

By Gary J. Weston, Senior Attorney, Legal Aid of Western Ohio, Inc.*

*Legal Aid of Western Ohio, Inc., produces **the Plan Ahead & Protect Yourself! Series for Seniors**, a set of classes about legal rights, community legal resources, and ways for people to handle their own legal issues. Each Focus on Aging newsletter this year features an article by Gary J. Weston providing education and information about one topic from the series. This is the third article.*

We probably have all heard, and possibly even repeated, some well-worn sayings such as “an apple a day keeps the doctor away,” a “stitch in time saves nine,” and an “ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!”

Did you ever stop to think, however, that the idea in these phrases about preventing problems when possible could apply not just to your health, but also to legal issues affecting your health care?

Legal Aid of Western Ohio, Inc. (LAWO) would like older persons to better understand their legal rights, responsibilities, available resources, and options - including those related to future health decisions. The class titled *Health Advance Directives* is part of the *Plan Ahead & Protect Yourself Legal Series for Seniors*. In this class, LAWO explains how to plan ahead and get legal documents in place for future health decisions.

For example, by having a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care, an individual can appoint someone else (their “agent”) to make health decisions for them if they become unable to make health decisions in the future. This would apply not only to end-of-life situations but other times when a person cannot make or communicate a health decision (perhaps because they've had a serious accident). In this document, a person can also name an alternate agent, give the agent access to protected health information, and say who they would want a court to appoint as “guardian” if that ever were needed.

The Health Advance Directives class also reviews the “Living Will,” which is a way for a person to say that in an end-of-life situation if they are terminally ill or permanently unconscious (as defined by law), they do not want certain forms of life-sustaining treatment.

Both the Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care and Living Will are complex documents, so it is important to review them carefully and understand what they do and what they don't do.

More information is available (including short videos, audio clips, fact sheets, and a work book) by visiting www.legalaidline.org, Self-Help Center, Older Adults 60+ section. To schedule the Health Advance Directives class or one of our other legal classes and clinics at your site, please contact me at gweston@lawolaw.org or call (937) 535-4453.

** Legal Aid of Western Ohio (LAWO) is a non-profit law firm serving the civil legal needs of western Ohio's low-income individuals and families, and seniors. Gary J. Weston has over 40 years of experience leading, managing, supporting, and providing legal services for low-income persons, persons with disabilities, and seniors, and he is currently a Senior Attorney at LAWO. Future newsletter articles will feature more detailed information from the various "Plan Ahead & Protect Yourself" classes.*