# Begin the Conversation

As you start to celebrate the holidays with family and friends, look at this time as an opportunity to discuss not only your health care wishes, but your loved ones wishes as well. At any time in your life, you may be unable to communicate your healthcare choices because of an injury or serious illness. That's why it's important to make advance care planning decisions now. Having a plan will make it easier for you, your doctor and your loved ones to ensure your wishes are honored.

An advanced directive is a written or oral statement about how you want medical decisions made should you not be able to make them yourself and/or it can express your wish to make an anatomical donation after death. Some people make advance directives when they are diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. Others put their wishes into writing while they are healthy, often as part of their estate planning.

Three types of advance directives:

• A Living Will: It is a written or oral statement of the kind of medical care you want or do not want if you become unable to make your own decisions.

• A Health Care Surrogate Designation: It is a document naming another person as your representative to make medical decisions for you if you are unable to make them yourself. You can include instructions about any treatment you want or do not want, similar to a living will. You can also designate an alternate surrogate.

• An Anatomical Donation: It is a document that indicates your wish to donate, at death, all or part of your body. This can be an organ and tissue donation to persons in need, or donation of your body for training of health care workers. You can indicate your choice to be an organ donor by designating it on your driver's license or state identification card, signing a uniform donor form, or expressing your wish in a living will.

Once your advanced directive is completed:

• If you designate a healthcare surrogate and an alternate surrogate, be sure to ask them if they agree to take this responsibility, discuss how you would like matters handled, and give them a copy of the document.

• Make sure that your health care provider, attorney, and the significant persons in your life know that you have an advance directive and where it is located. You also may want to give them a copy.

• Set up a file where you can keep a copy of your advance directive (and other important paperwork). Some people keep original papers in a bank safety deposit box. If you do, you may want to keep copies at your house or information concerning the location of your safety deposit box.

• Keep a card or note in your purse or wallet that states that you have an advance directive and where it is located.

• If you change your advance directive, make sure your healthcare provider, attorney, and the significant persons in your life have the latest copy.

For more information and to print advanced directive forms, go to begintheconversation.org, select the state you would like, then click on state resources and select the form needed.

What a gift to yourself and your family!

Taken from www.begintheconversation.org