

Taking Charge of Your Healthcare

Making decisions about future medical care can be emotional and challenging, but pre-planning and letting your wishes be known to those closest to you in the event that you are incapacitated (even temporarily) should be a priority for everyone.

It's important to take the time to make decisions about your healthcare when you can talk things over with your loved ones, sharing your wishes in a calm, thoughtful way rather than in the turmoil of a medical crisis. Advance Directives:

- are not complicated or expensive to execute
- can be executed without going to a lawyer — you can complete the necessary documents yourself and put them in place with witnesses and a Notary Public
- are recommended for anyone over 18 year old

You can then share this information with your primary care physician and your loved ones, making sure that family members know where the documents are located and designating a trusted person as your healthcare proxy to help ensure that your wishes are respected. The person you choose can be:

- a spouse
- a family member
- someone not related to you such as a friend
- in short, someone you trust to be a strong advocate on your behalf

Remember, it's your right to participate in and plan for your care, long before critical decisions must be made. Please take the time to think and talk about your feelings and beliefs with your loved ones in the event that you are unable to make your own healthcare decisions at any given point in time.

Portsmouth Regional Hospital will honor Advance Directive documents from other states as long as they comply with NH law. Residents of other states should check with a lawyer for specific document requirements.

Did You Know?

According to a 2002 survey, only 15-20% of Americans have taken the step of designating a healthcare proxy. Nearly half of Americans say they would rely on friends or family to carry out their wishes, but "most have never told anyone exactly what they want."*

* *Boston Globe*, 3/22/05

The State of New Hampshire recognizes two forms of Advance Directives. You can download these forms at our Web site at www.portsmouthhospital.com. We also encourage you to download, print, and read the *Advance Care Planning Guide* published by the Foundation for Healthy Communities.

Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare (DPOAH)

- allows you to name a trusted person (and an alternate) to act as your healthcare agent (or proxy) to make medical decisions for you should you become incapacitated
- can include instructions about what treatments (such as mechanical respiration or kidney dialysis) you do or do not want, how long you want them for, and your specific wishes about artificial feeding (feeding tube), hydration (intravenous fluids), and medication to control pain
- takes effect whenever you become unable to participate in making your own decisions (examples: during surgery or if you are unconscious, even temporarily)

Living Will

- instructs your healthcare provider to give no life-sustaining treatment in the case of a terminal condition or if you are permanently unconscious
- can include your wishes about not wanting artificial feeding or hydration
- takes effect only when there is no hope of recovery

It is important to have both documents in place since they serve two distinct purposes. NH law will honor the DPOAH in the event of an Advance Directive conflict between the two.

As required by law, we provide our patients with information on Advance Directives prior to their stay at Portsmouth Regional Hospital. It is important for you to carefully consider your choices when it comes to planning your care, including refusal of treatment and other preferences. We want to give you an opportunity to do so with your loved ones in the privacy of your own home, and that is why we include Advance Directives information as a part of our pre-admission package.

We will be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have about Advance Directives. You may also want to talk things over with your physician, or consult an attorney for additional legal advice.

At Portsmouth Regional Hospital, we have an Advance Directive Team in place that reflects our commitment to the importance of pre-planning and giving patients the opportunity to provide us with guidance about their medical care.

To speak with a team member, please contact the Case Management Department at 603-433-4019, Monday - Friday, 7:30am to 4:00pm.

A Higher Standard of Caring

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