Cancer Support Resource
for Patients, Families, Caregivers

# Help with discussing and deciding treatment options and what is important to you

**- Advance Medical Directives / Living Will / POLST**

Online version with active resource links at: cancer-help.me/decisions

## Understanding Your Treatment

**Planning for health care now or in the future is an important for making sure you get the medical care you want. Having conversations about your care and the future are important to have with family, friends, caregivers and care team. These conversations may be revisited throughout your treatment and can be very important if the cancer is or becomes advanced.**

**To the right are some tips for starting a conversation when you want others to know how you feel about the treatment you are being offered, or receiving, and what is important to you and your quality of life.**

Content adapted from websites below.

## Questions to think about that may help:

- **Quality of life. What does that mean to you?** How do you want to live? What is important for you to continue being able to do throughout treatment or if you become seriously ill? Is there a special event you want to be a part of in the future? It may be helpful to think about what is not important to you also.
- **Do you understand how the course of your illness will go and are you able to identify and express your concerns to your loved ones?** If not, share with your care team what you do know so they can help you to understand what you don't.

## When you are ready to have a discussion:

- **Have a conversation with your loved ones.** Discuss your thoughts and wishes with the people who would be involved in making decisions for you if you aren't able to make them yourself.
- **Identify a loved one who can make decisions.** Who do you trust to understand your values and what quality of life means to you? Make sure this person is willing to make decisions for you if needed and that they know and understand what's important to you.
- **Talk with your health care providers.** Once you have defined your own terms for quality of life and identified someone to carry out your wishes, share your decisions with your doctor to provide input and perspective. Then review all of it with a health care provider who has experience with these decisions and the paperwork.
- **Complete the paperwork.** Completing advance medical directives makes your wishes known in writing about medical treatment before you need such care. Research shows there is less distress and better quality of life when these decisions are early and in writing.

## The 3 Types of Advance Medical Directives:

**Power of Attorney for Health Care** is a legal document allowing you to designate who can make medical decisions for you (called a proxy or agent), if there is ever a time when you cannot make decisions yourself.

**Living Will** is a legal document that states whether you want certain life-saving medical treatments to be used, or not used, under specific circumstances.

**POLST Form (Practitioner Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment)** is a portable medical order on paper signed by you and your doctor that states what kind of medical treatment you want or do not want toward the end of your life.

## Resources for Additional Information:

- American Cancer Society, Advance Directives
- NIH, Advance Directives
- Cancer.Net, Putting Your Health Care Wishes in Writing
- Cancer.Net, When You and Your Family Differ on Treatment Choices
- Cancercare.org, Advanced Care Planning: Be Prepared
- The Conversation Project
- NCI, Coping With Advanced Cancer
- National POLST Paradigm
- Five Wishes, taking about advance care planning
- PREPARE™ for your care, advance directive help
- CareingInfo

## Recursos en Español:

- American Cancer Society, Directivas por anticipado
- NIH, Instrucciones por adelantado
- Cancer.Net, Expresar sus deseos de atención médica por escrito
- Cancer.Net, Cuando usted y su familia difieren en las opciones de tratamiento

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