

Advance Care Planning

Faith communities (and Faith Community Nurses) can have a significant impact on dealing with complex end-of-life issues. **Advance Care Planning (ACP)** is a process which helps people think about, talk about, and write down their choices for future health care decisions. It is understanding the choices available and what those choices mean. It is making decisions about the healthcare you would want to receive if you happen to become unable to speak for yourself. It is thoughtful discussions with loved ones about your desires and values for future health care treatment decisions. These are your decisions to make, regardless of what you choose for your care, and the decisions are based on your personal values, preferences, and discussions with your loved ones. The result of these conversations is usually a written document known as a **Health Care Directive**.

An **advance healthcare directive**, also known as **living will**, **personal directive**, **advance directive**, **medical directive** or **advance decision**, is a legal document in which a person specifies what actions should be taken for their health if they are no longer able to make decisions for themselves because of illness or incapacity.

While it's not an easy topic to consider, it is important for every adult to have a Health Care Directive - a written plan for loved ones and health care providers to follow- so that their wishes are known if a time comes when they cannot speak those wishes.

There are 4 basic steps:

- **Start thinking about your goals and values** related to healthcare and quality of life.
- **Talk with family, friends, and others** who might be involved in your life and healthcare in the future. Select your Agent - the person you want to legally name to make decisions for you when you can't.
- **Write down your wishes, choices, and preferences** in a health care directive. As you write your wishes, you may find it helpful to talk with others such as your primary health care provider, your spiritual leader, family members, or others who advise you.
- Keep the original yourself. Then, **share copies with others**.

Contact me at Joanne.Hall@elimcare.org for more information on making Advance Care Planning available to your church community.