

# **Advance Directives:** Your Decisions – Your Wishes



**Advance Directives** reflect your decisions – in advance – about health care and treatment. The best time to prepare Advance Directives is while you are able to consider your wishes carefully and discuss them with your doctor and people close to you.

While no one is required to prepare Advance Directives, all care providers are mandated by Florida law to make patients and families aware of them. In the state of Florida, there are two basic types of Advance Directives - **Living Will** and **Designation of Health Care Surrogate (DHCS)**.

727.HOSPICE (467.7423) • 727.536.7364

### **Living Will:**

- indicates what kind of medical treatment you do or do not want to receive - makes your wishes known.
- should be discussed with your family, friends, clergy and doctor.
- goes into effect only if you are no longer able to make decisions or communicate your wishes yourself.
- is used only when your diagnosis is:
  1. a terminal condition from which there is no reasonable probability of recovery, or
  2. an irreversible end-stage condition that has resulted in permanent and severe deterioration, or
  3. a persistent vegetative state or irreversible condition of unconsciousness with no voluntary action or ability to communicate purposefully.

### **Designation of Health Care Surrogate Document:**

- states that you authorize another person to make medical decisions for you when you are no longer capable of doing so (based on your desires).
  - lets you choose to include specific instructions if you have a medical condition.
  - goes into effect if and only if you are unable to communicate your wishes.
  - allows your surrogate to make a needed decision for you if a situation you did not cover in this document occurs.
  - allows the person you designate as your health care surrogate to give informed consent, review medical records, talk to your physicians, authorize transfers to different health care facilities, apply for public health care benefits and consent to organ and tissue donation according to your wishes.
- The best person to select as your health care surrogate** is a competent adult who knows and respects your values, religious beliefs and preferences regarding medical treatment.
- You may want to list alternate surrogates** as well in case your first choice becomes unable or unwilling to carry out your wishes.
- Let your health care surrogate know** you have chosen him or her to assume this role if the need ever arises.

## **Examples of Treatment Choices**

- life-support: any medical treatment or intervention that restores a vital function that is no longer working on its own – does not include comfort care measures or pain control measures.
- artificial nutrition and hydration: nutrients and fluids given through intravenous (IV) lines or feeding tubes.
- ventilator: a breathing machine that fills the lungs with air.
- dialysis: an artificial kidney machine that removes waste products from the blood.
- cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR): interventions that attempt to restart breathing and heartbeat.
- do not resuscitate (DNR): a doctor's order stating your wish not to have CPR

## **How to Develop a Living Will and DHCS**

- Talk with your family, friends, clergy and doctor about your wishes and values.
- Complete a Living Will and a DHCS document using the form in this packet.
- Have two valid witnesses sign the forms. Follow the instructions on the forms about whom can sign as witnesses.
- Florida does not require that a lawyer prepare your Living Will or DHCS. However, if there is something you do not understand or if you have questions, contact a lawyer, health care provider or social worker for help.
- Place your original, signed documents in an accessible place, not in a safety deposit box or inaccessible location. Give copies to others, including your family, health care surrogates, lawyer, clergy, doctors, etc.
- Take a copy of these documents with you whenever you seek hospital treatment.

## **Changing or Canceling Your Living Will or DHCS**

- It is a good idea to review your Living Will and DHCS annually or when life or health conditions change to make sure they continue to reflect your wishes.
  - You may change or cancel your Living Will and DHCS at any time.
- You can do this by:
1. preparing new documents and having them witnessed, or
  2. destroying your old forms, or
  3. stating your new choices to your doctor(s) and health care surrogate(s).

## **Without a Living Will and DHCS**

Every person has the right to prepare a Living Will and a DHCS. If you have not indicated who will speak for you if you are not capable of communicating, someone will be appointed to make decisions on your behalf.

It is important to communicate your wishes to your family and friends because they may be asked to make your health care decisions.

By law, if you have not designated a HCS a person will be appointed in the following order:

- spouse or court appointed guardian
- adult child
- parent
- adult sibling
- adult relative
- adult friend who knows you well
- clinical social worker





Project GRACE is a nonprofit advance care planning organization that helps individuals and professionals create, communicate and honor future medical care wishes.

An affiliate of the Suncoast Hospice, Project GRACE brings consumers, health care, legal and faith professionals together for shared health care decision-making.

Founded in 1999, Project GRACE's mission is to educate the community about effective advance care planning, empower individuals to communicate and implement their medical treatment decisions and promote the belief that all persons are entitled to dignified care in the final phase of life.

5771 Roosevelt Boulevard • Clearwater, Florida 33760  
727.536.7364 • 877.99.GRACE • [www.projectgrace.org](http://www.projectgrace.org)



Suncoast Hospice is a not-for-profit, comprehensive hospice and palliative care provider committed to serving those living with serious or chronic illnesses, nearing the end of life, dealing with end-of-life issues or experiencing grief. Holistic in its approach, Suncoast Hospice helps to guide patient families and caregivers as they provide support and assist with decision making. Further, Suncoast Hospice offers its community – regardless of race, age, faith, diagnosis or financial circumstances – such options as caregiver education, individual and group grief counseling, spiritual support and many other programs. Founded in 1977 by volunteers, thousands of patients and their families are served each day by Suncoast Hospice's professional staff and more than 3,000 valued volunteers. To learn more about Suncoast Hospice, call (727) HOSPICE (467-7423) or logon to [www.thehospice.org](http://www.thehospice.org).

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