

MCI Practice Guideline

Advance Directives

Advance Directives that are in written form are legal documents. However the laws to prepare them can vary from state to state. There are two types of Advance Directives-A Living Will and A Power of Attorney for Health Care.

A Living Will is a document in which the patient describes his/her wishes in regards to medical treatment when unable to communicate at the end of life. A Power of Attorney for Health Care, (Durable Power of Attorney) is utilized when a patient appoints someone, in writing, to make decisions regarding healthcare when they are in a condition that they can not make those decisions for themselves.

To this end, Mercy Clinics Inc. endorses the following practice guideline.

1. **All patients 18 and older** that are mentally competent and independent should be counseled on the reasons and importance of having an Advance Directive.
 - The most important reason is to be able to state a preference about medical care before a serious injury or illness occurs.
 - The patient should understand that an Advance Directive *does not* mean “Do not Treat”.
 - The provider should discuss with each patient the type of treatments that maybe required or encountered when faced with a serious illness or injury.

2. Ways to write Advance Directives include:
 - Forms can be provided by their physician, a lawyer, or from the state department for the aging.
 - There are many internet web sites that allow downloading of legal documents for free. An important referral site that is recognized and recommended by Mercy Clinics Inc. is called Five Wishes.
 - Five Wishes is now valid in over forty states, including Iowa.
 - It is written in everyday language and has been shown to help patients discuss this subject with their physician.
 - Their website address is <http://www.agingwithdignity.org/fw2007.html>

Reference: Five Wishes, Aitkin PV, American Family Physician 1999; 59(3):605-612
AARP Advance Directive Information aarp.org

Variation from this guideline is always acceptable, if in the opinion of the attending physician, individual circumstances require it.