



New Jersey Department of Health

YOUR RIGHT TO MAKE HEALTH CARE DECISIONS IN NEW JERSEY

This document explains your rights to make decisions about your own health care under New Jersey Law. It also tells you how to plan ahead for your health care if you become unable to decide for yourself because of an illness or accident. It contains a general statement of your rights and some common questions and answers.

Your Basic Right

You have the right to receive an understandable explanation from your doctor of your complete medical condition, expected results, benefits and risks of the treatment recommended by your doctor, and reasonable medical alternatives. You have the right to accept or refuse any procedure or treatment used to diagnose or treat your physical or mental condition, including life-sustaining treatment.

You also have the right to control decisions about your health care in the event you become unable to make your own decisions in the future by completing an advance directive.

What happens if I am unable to decide about my health care?

If you become unable to make treatment decisions, due to illness or an accident, those caring for you will need to know about your values and wishes in making decisions on your behalf. That's why it's important to write an advance directive.

What is an advance directive?

An advance directive is a document that allows you to direct who will make health care decisions for you and to state your wishes for medical treatment if you become unable to decide for yourself in the future. Your advance directive may be used to accept or refuse any procedure or treatment, including life-sustaining treatment.

What types of advance directives can I use?

There are three kinds of advance directives that you can use to say what you want and who you want your doctors to listen to:

A PROXY DIRECTIVE (also called a "durable power of attorney for health care") lets



you name a “health care representative,” such as a family member or friend, to make health care decisions on your behalf.

An INSTRUCTION DIRECTIVE (also called a “living will”) lets you state what kinds of medical treatments you would accept or reject in certain situations.

A COMBINED DIRECTIVE lets you do both. It lets you name a health care representative and tells that person your treatment wishes.

Who can fill out these forms?

You can fill out an advance directive in New Jersey if you are 18 years or older and you are able to make your own decisions. You do not need a lawyer to fill it out.

Who should I talk to about advance directives?

You should talk to your doctor, family members, close friends, or others you trust to help you. Your doctor or a member of our staff can give you more information about how to fill out an advance directive.

What should I do with my advance directive?

You should talk to your doctor about it and give a copy to him or her. You should also give a copy to your health care representative, family member(s), or others close to you. Bring a copy with you when you must receive care from a hospital, nursing home or other health care agency. Your advance directive becomes part of your medical records.

What if I do not have an advance directive?

If you become unable to make treatment decisions and you do not have an advance directive, your close family members will talk to your doctor and in most cases, may then make decisions on your behalf. However, if your family members, doctor, or other caregivers disagree about your medical care, it may be necessary for a court to appoint someone as your legal guardian. (This may be needed if you do not have a family member to make decisions on your behalf.) That is why it is important to put your wishes in writing to make it clear who should decide for you and to help your family and doctor know what you want.

Will my advance directive be followed?

Yes. Everyone responsible for your care must respect your wishes that you have stated in your



advance directive. However, if your doctor, nurse or other professional has a sincere objection to respecting your wishes to refuse life-sustaining treatment, he or she may have your care transferred to another professional who will carry them out.

What if I change my mind?

You can change or revoke any of these documents at a later time.

Will I still be treated if I do not fill out an advance directive?

Yes. You do not have to fill out any forms if you do not want to and you will still get medical treatment. Your insurance company also cannot deny coverage based on whether or not you have an advance directive.

What other information and resources are available to me?

Your doctor or a member of our staff can provide you with more information about our policies on advance directives. You may ask for written informational materials and help. If there is a question or disagreement about your health care wishes, we have an ethics committee or other individuals who can help.