

# Planning for Your Care in Advance

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*What you need to know about advance directives*

## What is an advance directive?

An **advance directive** is a way for you to let us know the kind of health care you would want—or not want—should you ever become unable to make your own health care decisions due to illness or injury. In other words, it lets you **direct** your care in **advance**.

There are 2 basic types of advance directives:

- One type lets you tell others what sorts of treatments you would or would not want should you ever become unable to speak for yourself. Many people know this type of advance directive as a **living will** or **advance care plan**.
- Another type of advance directive lets you name someone to make decisions for you if you are unable. This person is called a **health care agent** or **proxy**. To name an agent you must be an adult or emancipated minor (someone under 18 who is legally independent of parental control). The agent named must be an adult.

You can use the **Tennessee Advance Directive for Health Care** to make an advance care plan, name a health care agent, or both. Ask us if you would like a copy of this form.

You can also appoint an agent or proxy using a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care, or Medical Power of Attorney.

## Why are you asking me if I have an advance directive?

In the Vanderbilt Patient and Family promise, we pledge to make patients and families the most important members of the health care team and to honor their values and wishes. An advance directive is an important way for us to know our patients' wishes should they ever become unable to speak for themselves.

We will ask you about advance directives in both the hospital and the clinic. We do this for several reasons.

First, we want to make sure that the information we have for you is correct. Over time your wishes for care may change. We want to know if this happens so that we can be sure to care for you the way you want to be cared for.

Also, the doctor you see the most for your care may be the best person to talk with about advance directives. This is a difficult and complex conversation, and you should have it with someone you trust and who knows you, whether this is in the hospital or the clinic.

Finally, you never know when you may need an advance directive. Getting your wishes on paper now helps guide our care should you ever have to go to the hospital.

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## What do I need to do to make an advance directive?

As long as you are a competent adult or emancipated minor, all you need to do is complete and sign a form that complies with Tennessee law. (“Competent” means that you are legally able to make decisions for yourself.)

When you sign the form, your signature must be **either** witnessed by 2 adults **or** notarized by a notary public.

If you use 2 witnesses,

- both must be competent adults.
- neither can be:
  - your health care agent
  - the provider in charge of your care or someone employed by the provider.
- only one can be:
  - related to you
  - able to inherit from you.

## When would my advance directive go into effect?

Unless your directive says otherwise, it would only go into effect when you are unable to make medical decisions for yourself.

## What if I want to change or take back my advance directive?

You can change or take back an advance directive, in part or in whole, any time you want. You can do this in writing or by telling your agent or provider.

You can also change or take back your choice of health care agent at any time, either in a written and signed statement or by personally telling your provider.

## I’m not from Tennessee. Is my advance directive still good here?

Yes—as long as it complies with Tennessee law or with the laws of the state where it was made.

## I’ve written my advance directive. Now what do I do?

- Go over it with your provider.
- Bring a copy with you when you come to the clinic or hospital so that it can be put into your medical record.
- Keep a copy where others can find it.
- Tell your family and friends what is in it.
- Give a copy to your agent if you have one.

Don’t forget to do all these things again should you ever change or take back your directive.