

## **Advance Medical Directives/Living Wills**

What would happen if you could no longer make decisions about your medical care and treatment because you were seriously ill or injured? How would your family and physician know your wishes? How do you feel about ventilators, surgery, resuscitation (CPR), drugs or tube feedings if you were terminally ill, senile, or unconscious and not likely to wake up? Who would make these decisions on your behalf? You can plan ahead and communicate your wishes by writing an **advance medical directive**, also sometimes called a living will or a durable power of attorney for health care (DPOA). This document outlines the medical treatment you'd want (or not want), and names the person you'd want to make health care decisions for you if you could no longer speak for yourself.

Advance directives are not just for the elderly. Unexpected situations can happen at any time – a serious accident or a life-threatening event such as a stroke or heart attack can happen at any age, leaving a person unable to communicate his or her choices about treatment.

No one can require you to have an advance medical directive. You can still make treatment choices while you are competent. “Competent” means that you understand your condition and the results your decisions may have. But if you are no longer competent, and you have made sure your family knows what you would want, it makes it much easier to follow your wishes. Without knowing your wishes in advance, families can be torn apart trying to decide what is best for you. In the event of disagreements or disputes, the court may have to name a guardian to make decisions on your behalf – and this person would likely be a stranger to you.

You can obtain sample advance directive forms from Metro Health Hospital, from the State Bar of Michigan, the Michigan State Medical Society, your state representative and senior citizen groups. Sample forms are also available at the following public links:

[www.michbar.org/elderlaw/adpamphlet.cfm](http://www.michbar.org/elderlaw/adpamphlet.cfm)

[www.agingwithdignity.org/5wishes.html](http://www.agingwithdignity.org/5wishes.html)