ADVANCE CARE PLANNING:  
BE PREPARED

It is possible that, because of illness or injury, one may become unable to talk to a doctor or make personal medical decisions. By planning in advance, one can help make sure that their wishes about treatment will be followed. This is true for either a short or long illness. If one does not plan ahead, family may not be allowed to fulfill their loved one’s wishes or know what they are.

WHY IS ADVANCE CARE PLANNING NECESSARY?

When people are feeling well, it is sometimes difficult for them to think about being ill. It is understandable that many families avoid speaking about serious illness and end-of-life issues. But professionals find that people who spend some time thinking about these issues when they are healthy reduce their worry and stress about the future. They also reduce the burden on their loved ones.

How can I and my doctor be on the same page? In order to have a comprehensive relationship with doctors, let them know what your wishes are, and provide them with any information and documentation they need. (This is especially important when a relative faces serious illness.) “Advance care planning” describes the discussions you should have with your family in order to tell the doctor about the care you prefer at the time of serious illness. This will enable your doctor to know you better and join you as a partner in your treatment. For the best care, you need to be a team. It will also give you and your family more control over your medical care and a sense of well-being.

How can I get the best medical care? We encourage families to talk to one another and discuss the types of care preferred in times of serious illness. These conversations can decrease the stress and burden that adult children feel when difficult decisions have to be made in times of crisis or when loved ones are unable to make decisions for themselves. Having a plan in place in case of emergencies means that everyone has the information to make the most thoughtful decisions.

Is talking about serious illness or cancer bad luck? No. Unfortunately, people become ill even if they do not think or talk about it. Health care professionals believe that discussing and planning for serious illness leads to better care and more control for you and your family. Speaking openly about illness leads to better decisions and better quality of life.
HOW DO I START TO THINK ABOUT THE KIND OF HEALTH CARE I WANT?

Many people choose to speak with their family, friends, their health care team, or spiritual leaders when trying to decide the type of care they would want. It is equally helpful to think about the medical care a friend or loved one received at the end of life and consider what you valued about their care. This can be very beneficial when you think about what type of care you would want for yourself.

Here are some possible questions that might be helpful in starting these types of conversations with your loved ones:

• What does good quality of life mean to you?
• How important is it to you to remain independent?
• Do you value making your own decisions?
• Are you concerned about letting another adult make medical decisions for you if you are unable? What worries you most?
• Are there any medical treatments you would surely want when facing the end of life? Any treatments you might refuse?
• When thinking about serious illness, what are you afraid of?
• What role do you want your family to have in making decisions about your health care?
• If your family wants to protect you from receiving information, should the medical team honor these wishes?
• What does “dying with dignity” mean to you?
• What does “dying a good death” mean to you?

Online Resource: The Conversation Project (www.theconversationproject.org) can provide additional information about starting the conversation and resources for you and your loved ones.

**CancerCare® Can Help**

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercare.org or call 800-813-HOPE (4673).

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