

Demystifying Advance Care Planning & Advance Care Directives

Advance Care Planning is “the **process** of preparing for likely scenarios near the end of life that usually includes assessment of, and dialogue about, a person’s understanding of their medical history and condition, values, preferences, and personal and family resources”^①.

With the increase in life expectancy, often with associated chronic illness, older people are sometimes unable to participate in discussions and decisions about their ongoing medical care. Advance care planning provides an opportunity to address this issue. Advance care planning allows people, whilst they still have the capacity, to determine their care and medical treatment for the future, and to give someone they trust the authority to act on those wishes should the need arise.

What is an Advance Care Directive?

An Advance Care Directive or Living Will is a **written document** “that describes one’s future preferences for medical treatment in anticipation of a time when one is unable to express those preferences because of illness or injury”^①. An advance care directive is available for any person who is over the age of 18 and is capable of understanding the implications of their choices.

Where can health professionals obtain more information on this topic?

NSW Health has published the document “Using Advance Care Directives” and “Guidelines for End-of-Life Care and Decision Making”. The documents provide advice to health professionals on the best practice use of advance care directives within an advance care planning process and the optimal approach to reaching end of life treatment decisions with dying patients and their families. The documents are available at www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs.

Where can my patient/resident obtain more information?

- The Advance Care Directive Association Inc., a non-profit organisation, has a book “My Health, My Future, My Choice” that explains what individuals can do to make sure that their future health and personal care choices are known. It also provides an advance care directive form. Copies of the book, at a cost of \$14 (incl. postage) can be obtained by contacting the Association on 0423 157 003. Alternatively an order form can be downloaded from http://www.adgp.com.au/client_images/19665.pdf

References: ^① NSW Department of Health 2004 – Using Advance Care Directives & ^②Advanced Care Directive Association Inc. 2003 – My Health, My Future, My Choice