

Proactive Care Planning for COVID-19

What matters most to you matters to us

What if you had a sudden, severe illness and could not speak for yourself?

Who would you want to speak for you?

What would you want them to know about your preferences for care?

The fear and uncertainty we all are feeling related to COVID-19 is real, and it is understandable. During so much uncertainty amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the one thing you can control is who speaks for you if you can't speak for yourself. The best time to plan for future healthcare choices is before a medical crisis occurs. It is more important than ever that your loved ones and healthcare team understand what matters most to you in the event that you become seriously ill.

Why is this important to do now?

Having a conversation before a medical crisis occurs allows time for reflection about how a serious illness may impact your health and your life. It helps you:

- Think about your values and goals,
- Reflect on healthcare choices you may have to make if you become severely ill,
- Choose a person who can make decisions for you if you cannot make them yourself, and
- Talk with this person and other loved ones about your goals, values and preferences for medical care if you were to become ill.

Make sure your healthcare team is aware of these things and includes them in your plans for care. They can also help you record decisions and preferences in a legal document, such as an advance directive or power of attorney for healthcare.

Who else should be included in this discussion?

Your healthcare team would like to have a conversation with you about what matters the most to you in the event you become ill, need assistance with complex medical decisions, or cannot speak for yourself.

We encourage you to also choose someone you trust to make decisions for you and include them in this discussion. This person is called a healthcare agent and can support you with complex medical decisions and would make decisions for you in the future if you are unable.

It is important that you choose a healthcare agent or dedicated decision maker who is willing to:

- Accept this role,
- Talk with you about your goals, values, and preferences,
- Follow your decisions (even if they do not agree with them), and
- Make decisions in difficult moments (such as stressful times, differing opinions, crisis situations).

Do you know anyone who could do this?

Have you already chosen someone to be your healthcare agent?

Start the conversation by talking about what matters most to you

There's no way to tell if a sudden illness, such as COVID-19, could leave you unable to make your own decisions. Your healthcare agent and loved ones may need to make decisions about treatment options and where you might receive care, such as in your home, hospital, or care facility. By giving direction ahead of time, your agent, loved ones, and doctors will know what matters most to you, treatments you want, and treatments that match your goals and values.

This conversation will help them to know your answers to questions such as:

- *“What is most important for you to live well? For example, if you were having a good day, what would happen on that day?”*
- *“What personal, cultural, or spiritual beliefs do you have, if any, that would impact your care?”*
- *“What do you want if you became very ill? For example, would you want your medical care to focus on living longer, maintaining current health, or comfort care?”*
- *What worries you most about the situation? What fears do you have?”*
- *“What else would you want us to know about what is important to you at this time?”*

What else needs to be considered?

Understanding the complications of COVID-19 in the context of your current medical condition will help you weigh the benefits and burdens of treatment options—from your perspective—and then discuss your priorities for medical care with those closest to you, your doctor and healthcare team.

What is an advance directive?

It is important to write down your goals, values, and preferences. In addition to conversations with your healthcare team, we recommend that you use a document called an advance directive or power of attorney for healthcare document. This allows you to choose a person who can make healthcare decisions for you. This person will *only* make decisions if you cannot make them yourself.

Start planning now

These can be tough things to talk about especially in these uncertain times. Think of these conversations as a gift of love to those close to you. Knowing your decisions, goals, and values will be a great comfort to them. They won't have to wonder if they are making a decision you would want them to make.

Make an appointment (telephonic, telemedicine, video conference, or in-person, as appropriate) to talk with a clinician (e.g., Facilitator, nurse, social worker, chaplain, physician, advanced practitioner) to have this important conversation.