



ADVANCE CARE PLANNING: START THE CONVERSATION

By: Broek Lewis, LMSW



Have you ever thought about what will happen if you become seriously ill or disabled? Would your family know what kind of care you would like to receive? Yes, these are uncomfortable questions for most of us. But, think about how uncomfortable it will be for family members when they are faced with end of life decisions for you without any direction.

Advance Care Planning, a process of preparing for future medical decisions based on your wishes, values, and personal preferences; is a way you can stay in control of this aspect of your life and eliminate uncertainty for your family.

Taking the appropriate steps now by completing an “Advanced Directive” (a legal document specifying what actions should be taken for your medical care if you are no longer able to make those decisions) can give you confidence that your wishes are documented and, perhaps more importantly, are understood and will be followed by those who are closest to you.

Five years ago, Alice, a now 72 year-old with advancing dementia living in a

nursing home, had written an Advanced Directive for Healthcare while she was still able to make decisions on her own. She had been very specific about her healthcare wishes in this document. In case of life threatening conditions she wanted, “Comfort care only; NO heroics.”

Unfortunately, last month Alice had a fall, which resulted in internal bleeding. She was immediately sent to the hospital where the decision was made, after consultation with her only son, to put her on a breathing machine. The bleeding slowed but doctors were unable to stop it completely. After a week and two significant surgical procedures, a feeding tube was placed in her stomach in addition to her dependence on the respirator.

Two weeks after her fall Alice still remained in the hospital. It was at that time a physician happened to find within her medical chart the Advanced Directive in which she outlined her healthcare wishes. Alice’s son, who had already agreed to life prolonging treatment for her, had never had a conversation with his mother about her wishes and was never given a copy of her Advanced Directive.

This story is not uncommon. In fact, you may have already experienced something like this in your family or know someone who has. As a social worker, I have seen individuals and families face various uncertainties when it comes to properly initiating and carrying out an Advanced Directive because it is uncomfortable to face the reality that you may experience a situation where you are not able to make medical decisions for yourself. While none of us want this to

happen, we must all understand that it could happen.

As I have worked to raise awareness and acceptance of Advance Care Planning I have witnessed the profound benefits of a simple conversation. In one finding 80% of people say that if seriously ill, they would want to talk to their doctor about end-of-life care. However only a mere 7% reported having an end-of-life conversation with their doctor and only 25% had discussed their wishes with family or friends (California HealthCare Foundation, 2012). Discussing end of life wishes is how we care for each other. Unless you talk about it with those closest to you, your wishes may never be carried out.

I have seen these carefully composed documents misplaced or stashed away in drawers unable to be found when a medical decision needs to be made. That is why it is so important to have conversations with the people active in your life. They will be the ones who direct your care when you no longer can because in a crisis doctors will turn to those people – more than to any document – to learn what their patient wants.

Don’t take life for granted. In the blink of an eye everything can change. You can’t predict the future but you can be prepared for it. At the end of life each story is different, but you have the opportunity to be the author of your own story. I encourage you to start an Advance Care Planning conversation today with your family and physician. You can pick up an Advanced Directive document from your doctor’s office or online at <https://makingchoicesmichigan.org/resources/documents>. &

Caregivers,
Are You Tired?
We
Understand!

For dates, times, and to register, please contact Donna at (269) 441-9319

CentraCare’s experienced staff will lovingly care for your elderly loved one at our Battle Creek Day Center location to give you relief. **At NO CHARGE* to you!**
WE PROVIDE: Transportation, Nutritious Meal & Snack, Socialization, Assistance with Personal Care, and Cognitively Stimulating Activities.



200 W. Michigan Avenue | Battle Creek, MI 49017 | 269-441-9300 | www.mycentracare.com

*Funds for this program are made available through a grant from the Calhoun County Senior Millage and Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation