

# Making Health Care Decisions

You have the right to make health care decisions about what treatment you wish or do not wish to receive. The hospitals of Crozer-Keystone Health System will honor your right to make such decisions; however, anyone may lose the ability to make health care decisions due to illness or an accident, and end-of-life health care decisions may come up at any time. The hospital has a wide range of services with advanced technology that may be capable of providing life support to seriously ill patients, but there are times when difficult decisions need to be made.

Preparing an “advance directive” allows you to make decisions about your future medical treatment and/or choose who you want to make medical decisions when you are no longer able to make or express these choices. Pennsylvania recognizes three types of advance directives: living wills; health care power of attorney; and combination living will and health care power of attorney.

There is no requirement that you have an advance directive, but you will be asked during each admission if you have one. If you have an advance directive, please bring a copy every time you are admitted to the hospital and make sure your family and doctor also have a copy so that it can be placed in your medical record. You may change or revoke an advance directive at any time. Changes or revocations should be signed and dated and a copy provided to your family and doctor (and the hospital if you are in the hospital at the time).

## Types of Advance Health Care Directives

- **Living Will:** A written document that describes your wishes about life support and other medical treatments that you want or do not want to receive if you are unable to understand, make or communicate your treatment choices and have an end-stage medical condition or are permanently unconscious. For example, your choices about life-prolonging treatment — such as breathing machines, feeding tubes or dialysis — may be included in a living will.
- **Health Care Power of Attorney:** A written document in which you name a person you trust as your agent to make health care decisions for you. You can state in this document what choices you want your agent to make, when your agent may make those choices and how you want your agent to make those choices.
- **Combination Document:** A written document that combines both the living will and health care power of attorney.

## Creating an Advance Directive

Pennsylvania law does not require that you use a specific form when you make an advance directive. There is a sample form in the law that you can use. You may choose another form or you may write your own directive. You should talk to your doctor to help you to understand your medical conditions and the treatment choices you may have before making your advance directive. Once you make an advance directive you should discuss it with your family and any agent you name so they know your wishes and are comfortable in following them. You should also give a copy of your advance directive to your family, doctor, lawyer and anyone that you name as your health care agent. If you do not have an advance directive and are interested in creating one, please ask your nurse to contact the hospital’s Social Work department. Additional resources include:

- The hospital’s Medical Ethics Committee
- [www.pamedsoc.org/advancedirectives](http://www.pamedsoc.org/advancedirectives)
- American Association of Retired Persons

## Health Care Representatives

If you have no living will or available health care agent or legal guardian, Pennsylvania law allows a “health care representative” to make health care decisions for you if you are unable to make or communicate such decisions for yourself. A health care representative may be someone you choose while you are of sound mind. If you have not chosen someone then your health care providers will use someone from a list of family members and other persons close to you in the order listed in the law.