

ADVANCE CARE DIRECTIVES

Many of us procrastinate having the conversation on Advance Care Directive (ACD). It is a topic that can be confronting for not only you but for your loved ones. We may also find it confusing or don't know how to complete an ACD. Despite all this, the reality is that these conversations are more important now due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged many health care systems around the world. Australia has been fortunate not to have experienced these pressures. However, many health experts are predicting a second wave of COVID-19 due to the easing of COVID-19 restrictions. Due to these unforeseen circumstances with the COVID-19 pandemic it is important now to initiate the conversation of ACD. Why?

If you or your loved one becomes sick and placed in isolation, informed and shared decision making may become a challenge. This could potentially lead to unnecessary medical treatments that you did not want. Writing down your wishes in an ACD provides peace of mind and gives you the sense of control of what you do and do not wish to have with medical treatments. It also eases the stress and burden on your family or caregiver of having to make the challenging decision to treat or not to treat on your behalf if you were unable to tell people. Let's now take a look at what is required to complete an ACD.

Prior to completing an ACD you will need to appoint a medical treatment decision maker. The medical treatment decision maker must be someone that you trust and will respect your values and preferences. The Medical treatment decision maker will be responsible for communicating and advocating your medical wishes when you do not have the capacity to express your wishes.

ACD has three parts. First; your personal details, second; Values directive and third; Instructional Directive. Values Directive is a record of your values and preferences for your medical treatment. This section allows you to discuss what matters the most in your life. For example, family, friends, religion, cultural beliefs, spirituality, independence and interests. Values Directive allows you to articulate if you want to live as long as possible or if quality of life is your priority. Instructional directive is a legally binding statement in which you consent to, or refuse, future medical treatment (Office of Public Advocates, 2018). This should only be completed if you are certain of what you do or do not want in the future with medical treatments as it is a legally binding document (Office of the Public Advocate, 2018). If you have stated I do not want to be on a breathing machine (ventilator) this means you will not have this treatment even if you require it for a short time after post-surgery (Office of Public Advocates, 2018). This section of ACD needs to be carefully thought out and discussed with your doctor. To complete an ACD you must have a sound mind and it must be witnessed in front of two people. One must be a registered medical practitioner. It is important to know ACD can be cancelled at any time by completing a new ACD or completing the cancelling my Advance Care Directive form (Office of the Public Advocate, 2018).

Under the Medical Treatment Planning and Decisions Act if you have previously had an ACD and have completed a new ACD the previous ACD will be automatically cancelled. To add, If you have filled in the ACD and it has not been witnessed it will be a record of your values and preferences (Office of Public Advocates, 2018). With an ACD you can either fill in the Values directive or Instructional directive or both. Once you have completed the ACD you keep the original document. It is recommended that you give a certified copy to your medical treatment decision maker, GP, ambulance, your local hospital and upload it in My Health Record (Office of Public Advocates, 2018).

Having the conversation and completing ACD will alleviate any unnecessary treatments and will take the burden off your loved ones. Now is the time to start the conversation during these uncertain times with the COVID-19 pandemic. It's time to take control of your wishes not others making it for us.

References:

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