



TAYLOR TIDBITS

GIVE THE GIFT OF “PEACE OF MIND” TO YOUR FAMILY

Imagine for a moment that you have been admitted to an emergency room with a life-threatening illness. You are unconscious and completely unaware of what’s going on around you. You may never regain consciousness, but you can be kept alive indefinitely by a breathing machine. Could your loved ones decide whether to put you on the machine? Are your loved ones aware of your final health care wishes?

People who have made final health care decisions for a loved one, without knowing the person’s wishes, can tell you how hard it is. They will express the pain and guilt. They will share their doubt about what their loved one wanted. They will tell you how they still wonder whether their choices were the “right” ones. They will tell you that a discussion with your loved ones about final health care decisions is worth having. They will also express how much easier these decisions would have been had their loved one had an Advanced Directive for Healthcare.

IN THE STATE OF GEORGIA, all competent adults have the right to be informed about their medical treatment and to refuse that treatment for any reason. Sometimes this can be confusing, especially while you are a hospital patient or are in need of medical care. The best way to be sure your voice is heard in a medical setting is to write down your wishes in advance.

As of July 1, 2007, Georgia law changed and we now have one document called the “Georgia Advance Directive for Healthcare.” This new format combines the old Georgia Living Will and Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare into one comprehensive document. The old forms are still valid and will still be accepted as the patient’s legal wishes.

The new Georgia Advance Directive for Healthcare form has four parts.

Part One – Health Care Agent. This part allows you to choose someone to make health care decisions for you when you cannot (or do not want to) make health care decisions for yourself. The person you choose is called a health care agent.

Part Two – Treatment Preferences. This part allows you to state your treatment preferences if you have a terminal condition or if you are in a state of permanent unconsciousness. These life sustaining treatments and procedures include ventilator, CPR, artificial nutrition (feeding tubes), hydration (IV fluids), and kidney dialysis. Part Two will become effective only if you are

unable to communicate your treatment preferences. You should talk to your family, health care agent, and others close to you about your treatment preferences.

Part Three – Guardianship. This part allows you to nominate a person to be your guardian should one ever be needed.

Part Four – Effectiveness and Signature. This part requires your signature and the signature of two witnesses. You must complete Part Four if you have filled out any other part of this form.

Taylor Regional Hospital can provide you with copies of this document and assistance in completing the forms, if you wish. You can also obtain a copy at www.dhs.georgia.gov. Once the Advance Directive for Health Care form is completed, a copy should be given to your primary care physician, your local hospital, and the Health Care Agent.

There are a few important points to remember about Advanced Directives. A patient must be a fully competent adult to complete an Advance Directive. These documents are only in effect if you are not able to express your own thoughts and wishes about treatment issues. Advance Directives only cover healthcare decisions and have nothing to do with your financial affairs. You can change your mind at any time, by completing a new form, or telling someone that you have different wishes. You do not need a lawyer to complete the forms and the forms do not have to be notarized. If an Advance Directive is not in place, individuals who cannot make their own decision have to abide by the priority designations under the Georgia “next-of-kin” law. The Georgia Advance Directive for Health Care is not connected to any government health care program, such as Medicare or Medicaid, or the patient’s ability to pay for their health care.

Regardless of what your final health care decisions may be, they can only be respected if you share them with your loved ones. A completed Advance Directive for Healthcare form along with a discussion about your wishes could provide your loved ones with peace of mind this holiday season.

References: Georgia Health Decisions and Georgia Department of Human Services

Written by: Dawn Warnock, RHIA (*Dawn graduated from the Medical College of Georgia with a bachelor’s degree in Health Information Management. She has been employed by Taylor Regional Hospital as the Director of Health Information Services for 15 years.*)