

## Advance Care Planning – Who will speak for you?

Advance care planning isn't an easy subject. One of the most important decisions you'll ever make is planning for your future health and personal care.



It's never too early to start thinking about your wishes and taking the time to talk with your family and loved ones. The conversation may be difficult but it's important to make your wishes known while you are able to communicate for yourself.

As uncomfortable as it may be, scheduling a discussion during a family outing may be one way to get the conversation started now instead of waiting until someone becomes gravely ill and can no longer make their own health care decisions.

When older patients come into the office accompanied by their adult children, I ask for the patient's permission to speak with their relatives. Often, the conversation leads to the subject of advance care, who will be making decisions and whether the patient wants a signed Do Not Resuscitate or DNR order on file. All questions and answers are documented in writing on the patient's chart.

Patients receiving home and community care through HNH B CCAC also have an opportunity to speak with their care coordinator about advance care planning and depending on the person's health situation, CCAC's palliative care team may also become involved. It's important to have a designated health care power of attorney who can speak on your behalf especially if your personal health situation changes and you are not able to make your own decisions.

There are other considerations to think about. For example, if you're being treated for a disease, you may want to decide how long you wish to continue and when you wish to stop treatment altogether. To keep the lines of communication clear, share your thoughts with your power of attorney and other loved ones to ensure they are aware of exactly what you want. This will prevent confusion and disagreement among family members as you continue on your health journey.

It's also important to make sure you have a living will – a legal, written statement detailing your wishes regarding medical treatment and health care decisions to be used when you are no longer able to express your consent.

If you'd like to learn more about advance care planning or how to start the conversation with your family and loved ones about your health care wishes or choosing a substitute decision maker, please visit the links below for information and resources:

- <http://www.advancecareplanning.ca/>
- <http://www.makingmywishesknown.ca/> (Ontario specific)
- <http://www.hnhbhealthline.ca/>