



There's More To April Than Taxes: Take Control Of Your Health

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As spring fast approaches, we look forward to relief from the winter snowstorms of 2010. We welcome the April showers that bring May flowers, chirping birds, and the promise of warmer weather. And most of us become keenly aware of the April 15th deadline for filing our Federal and State income taxes. However, Americans are often less aware of National Healthcare Decisions Day, an annual event that takes place on April 16th. National Healthcare Decisions Day is a collaborative effort of national, state, and community organizations and is an initiative to encourage patients to express their wishes regarding healthcare and for providers and facilities to respect those wishes.

While more Americans are discussing and planning for end of life care and treatment, statistics estimate that only 1 in 3 Americans have a living will.

Additionally, only 12 percent of patients with an advance directive received input from their physician in its development and between 65 and 75 percent of physicians whose patients had an advance directive were not aware that it existed.

Do you know what healthcare treatments you would or would not want if you could not speak for yourself?

Do other people, including your family and your healthcare providers, know what your wishes are?

Do you have a written advance directive?



Advance care planning involves thinking about your individual values and priorities, learning about treatment options, talking about your decisions, and documenting your wishes. It is never too early to begin to have discussions about your preference for health care should you be faced with serious life limiting illness. Advance

care planning is important as it allows you to think about your values and options prior to a health care crisis and prevents you from making decisions under duress. It provides a guide for loved ones and gives them peace of mind- avoiding the uncertainty and anxiety of not knowing what a loved one would have wanted.

Advance directives document healthcare decisions at the end-of-life and are a tool to help you communicate your healthcare choices. Advance directives typically encompass two legal documents: a living will and a healthcare power of attorney. A living will is a document that lets you state your wishes about medical care in the event that you develop a terminal condition or enter a state of permanent unconsciousness and can no longer make your own medical decisions. A living will states what you want and do not want for medical treatments at the

end of life. A healthcare power of attorney (also called a healthcare proxy or agent, healthcare

surrogate, or a durable power of attorney for healthcare) allows you to appoint a person that you trust as your healthcare agent. This person is authorized

to make decisions on your behalf only if you are unable to speak for yourself. Your healthcare power of attorney can be anyone over the age of 18 and should be someone who knows your wishes about medical treatment, is willing to advocate on your behalf, and will honor your wishes.

You do not need a lawyer to prepare advance directives, although many people prepare advance directives with the assistance of a lawyer at the same time that other important legal documents are prepared. State-specific advance directives and other advance directive documents are readily available on the internet, through local community organizations, through your church or religious advisor, or through your healthcare provider. It is important to review your advance directive to ensure that it accurately reflects your decisions, that it includes all of the necessary information and that it is witnessed properly. After your advance directives are signed, it is wise to make several photocopies of the completed documents while keeping the original in a safe but easily accessible location. Photocopies should be given to your agent and other family members, your physician and your other healthcare providers.

April 16th, National Healthcare Decisions Day, provides an opportunity for you to talk with your loved ones about your healthcare preferences. Bring up the topic by stating; "Since today is National Healthcare Decisions Day, I

want to take this opportunity to talk with you about my decisions for healthcare if I am ever in a situation that I cannot speak for myself." Complete your advance directive if you have not already done so and encourage others to do the same.

Having a living will has been shown to increase the likelihood of dying at home – where most Americans would like to be cared for if faced with serious, life limiting illness.

Holy Redeemer Hospice provides the support necessary to ensure optimal management of pain or other symptoms associated with illness, emotional and spiritual support for patients and families, as well as practical assistance and guidance. With a focus of care on comfort and life quality, the Holy Redeemer Hospice team ensures that those facing life limiting-illnesses can do so with the peace, comfort, and dignity that they deserve and desire. Holy Redeemer Hospice has been providing comprehensive hospice care in the Atlantic, Cape May, and Ocean County communities for more than 25 years.



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feel better
about your
surroundings,
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