Advance Care Plans

This factsheet explains what is meant by the term Advance Care Planning and the purpose of an Advance Care Plan. It applies to people living in England and Wales. If you live in Scotland or Northern Ireland, or if you would like more information about planning ahead for your future care and treatment, please contact us.

What is Advance Care Planning?

Advance Care Planning is a process of discussing and/or formally documenting wishes for your future care. It enables health and care professionals to understand how you want to be cared for if you become too ill to make decisions or speak for yourself. Planning ahead in this way can also make things easier for your family and friends because it helps them to understand what you want when you are nearing the end of life.

Advance Care Planning generally happens in the context of a terminal illness or life-limiting condition, but it is important to remember that you can plan ahead for your future treatment and care at any time in your life. If you have been diagnosed with a chronic or terminal illness then someone involved in your care (such as your doctor or nurse) might initiate a discussion about Advance Care Planning. However, you do not have to wait for someone else to start a conversation about your wishes, you can ask them about it at any time.
Advance Care Planning is a voluntary process, so you do not have to take any steps to plan in advance unless you wish to do so.

**What steps are involved in Advance Care Planning?**

There is no set way to plan in advance but there are several things you can do to ensure people know how you would like to be cared for. You could:

- **discuss what you want with your healthcare team.** You can have a discussion with those involved in your care (such as a doctor or nurse) and explain your preferences for care. They should make a note of these wishes and let other relevant people know.

- **refuse specific treatment(s) in an Advance Decision to Refuse Treatment.** If you wish to refuse certain types of treatment you should complete a legally binding Advance Decision to Refuse Treatment (Advance Decision). Compassion in Dying can send you the form for free and provide support to complete it.

- **write down your wishes and preferences in an Advance Statement.** This allows you to document anything that is important to you in relation to your future treatment and care. Compassion in Dying’s free Advance Decision form has a section for you to express your wishes in this way.

- **appoint someone else to make decisions for you by making a Lasting Power of Attorney for Health and Welfare.** You can give someone the legal power to make decisions about your care if you lose capacity. Compassion in Dying can send you information on this and support you to complete the forms.

- **complete an Advance Care Plan,** such as the Preferred Priorities for Care document (see below for more information).
Advance Care Plans (ACPs)

Advance Care Plans will normally be made in partnership with your healthcare team when you enter the end-of-life phase, unlike Advance Decisions, Advance Statements and Lasting Powers of Attorney which can be made at any time. Advance Care Plans are used to record your care and treatment wishes. They should be attached to your medical notes and be easily accessible to those involved in your care. If you have made an Advance Decision, Advance Statement or Lasting Power of Attorney, this should be noted in your Advance Care Plan.

The most commonly used type of end-of-life care plan is called the Preferred Priorities for Care (PPC) document. Although you can decide what you want to include in the document, the PPC contains a number of questions to prompt you.

An Advance Care Plan is not legally binding. However, if you are near the end of life it is a good idea to make one so that people involved in your care know what is important to you. Doctors will try to follow your wishes and the document will be taken into account when deciding what is in your best interests. For more information on best interests decisions see our factsheet *What happens if I cannot make decisions about my care and treatment?*

You should include anything that is important to you in relation to your future health and care. The kind of wishes you can set out include:

- Where you want to receive care
- Where you want to be cared for when you are dying, and where you want to die
- Who you want to be with you
- Values such as religious belief
- Any dietary requirements you have
You should always talk to your doctor or nurse about your preferences. They will be able to explain your likely treatment and care options, and help you to understand how any decisions or choices you make will affect you. They can also discuss whether or not your wishes are realistic. For example, if you would prefer to die at home but do not have anyone close who can support you at home, it may be more realistic for you to be cared for in a hospice.

It can be difficult to talk to the people close to you about your wishes and preferences for the end of life. Sometimes they may not want to acknowledge that you are dying or they may disagree with you. However, if you feel able to, it is important to involve your family and friends when you fill in the document because it can help them to understand what you want, what is likely to happen to you, and to be realistic about what is possible.

Many people feel they need help from their nurse or doctor to fill in an Advance Care Plan. You can also complete one yourself. You can write your own or use this PPC document provided by Dying Matters: http://dyingmatters.org/sites/default/files/preferred_priorities_for_care.pdf

Once completed you should keep a copy yourself and give a copy to anyone who is involved in your care. You can change what you have written in your Advance Care Plan at any time, and it is a good idea to regularly review it to make sure that it is still an accurate reflection of your wishes.

How can we help?

Compassion in Dying can send you a free Advance Decision form and guidance notes that explain how to complete it. We can also support you to complete your form over the phone.
If you have any questions about Advance Decisions, Lasting Powers of Attorney, planning ahead or decision making more generally then please contact our Information Line (our contact details are on the last page).

- We can send you a copy of *Planning Ahead: Making Choices for the End of Life*, a free and comprehensive guide to planning ahead for your future care and treatment.

The following Compassion in Dying factsheets may be helpful:

- *Advance Decisions (Living Wills) – An introduction*
- *Advance Decisions (Living Wills) – Helpful questions to consider*
- *Lasting Powers of Attorney for Health and Welfare – An introduction*
- *What happens if I cannot make decisions about my care and treatment?*
- *Advance Statements*
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Compassion in Dying supports people to plan ahead to ensure their wishes for treatment and care are respected.

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