



Advance Care Planning

Take Action

Taking these steps prevents others from having to guess what you would want and helps takes the burden off your family and friends.

- **Choose** who your **Healthcare Agent** will be.
- **Think** about your preferences.
- **Write** down your treatment choices while you are able to think clearly.
- **Discuss** your values and choices with the person or persons you have chosen to be your decision maker and your family. It is difficult to foresee every possible circumstance, but knowing what is important to you will help them in making good decisions for you.



Healthcare Agents

What are my Health Care Agent's responsibilities?

- To see your healthcare wishes are followed when you are unable to make your own decisions known or understood, even if your wishes about a specific treatment are not known.
- To consider your beliefs and what is important to you and then try to decide as you would decide.
- It is important to choose a Health Care Agent who can respect your wishes and not substitute their own.
- Your Health Care Agent has no control over your money unless you specifically give them that power in a separate legal document.

How do I make sure my family and my doctors respect my choice of Health Care Agent and my medical wishes?

- Discuss your choice of healthcare agent and your treatment preferences with both family members and your doctor.
- Plan to sign a form which is called an **Advance Directive**, which designates who your Health Care Agent is, along with your treatment choices.
- Obtain a form through the hospital, your attorney or the Visiting Nurse Association.
- Ask questions of your doctor as your health changes, so that you can carry on the discussion about what choices are appropriate now.



Advance Directives

You have the right to **make health care decisions** in advance. These decisions, often called "Advance Directives," should be in writing. The most common directives are a **Living Will**, **Medical Durable Power of Attorney**, and **CPR Directive**.

A Medical Durable Power of Attorney allows you to designate who will be your decision-maker (Health Care Agent) and what kind of medical care you want, when you cannot speak for yourself.

A Living Will is a statement of life support choices in a very limited set of circumstances. (This is also called a Declaration as to Medical or Surgical Treatment.)

A CPR Directive is a separate document, available only through your doctor or the Colorado Department of Public Health, which directs pre-hospital and other emergency personnel to withhold CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation). To be binding it must be signed by both you and your physician.

Federal law requires Yampa Valley Medical Center to provide information about advance directives to patients we admit. Although you have the right to make an advance directive, you are not required to do so.

We recommend that you talk to your doctor about medical conditions which might make advance directives useful. Discuss with your family your wishes and beliefs about medical care.

If you do fill out advance directives, make sure that copies are given to your family and/or anyone whom you have asked to act on your behalf Healthcare Agent. It is your responsibility to provide these copies to your health care providers.

Other common Advance Directives:

The **Colorado Advance Directive** is a form prepared by the non-profit Caring Connections Program of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization and includes both a Medical Durable Power of Attorney and a Living Will legal in the State of Colorado.

The Five Wishes is a document, developed by a non-profit organization Aging with Dignity, that combines a medical durable power of attorney and your treatment choices with other information that you may want to let your family know about your wishes at the end-of-life. It is legal in many states including Colorado.

Frequently asked questions about Advance Directives:

How do I make my Advance Directive legal?

Sign your document in the presence of two witnesses, 18 years of age or older, who must also sign to show that they believe you to be of sound mind and under no constraint or undue influence.

Remember the witness *cannot* be:

- A person who has a claim against your estate upon your death,
- A person who knows or believes that he is entitled to any portion of your estate upon your death either as a beneficiary of a will in existence at the time the Advance Directive is signed or is an heir at law,
- Your attending physician or any other physician,

- An employee of your attending physician or treating healthcare facility, or
- A patient in your treating healthcare facility.

What if I change my mind?

- Sign a new advance directive
- Destroy your old advance directive
- Tell your healthcare agent, family members and doctor that you have made new choices.



How to Make Your Healthcare Decisions

Most of us are not medical experts, however we do know what is important to us. By reviewing the questions below you can help make sure that your medical care is consistent with what is most important to you.

Click here to download a questionnaire to help you with your decision making.

Critical times for decision-making

- Diagnosis of a chronic or life-threatening condition
- When there is a major change in a chronic illness
- When you are having frequent hospitalizations

Questions to ask your doctor

Remember to take someone with you to help you remember the answers

What is the goal of treatment?

- To make a decision about medical treatment, you need to know what the goal of the treatment is and how the disease and treatment might impact your life.
- There are 3 main goals of any medical treatment:
 - Cure
 - Stabilization of disease
 - Preparing for a comfortable and dignified death

Click here to download a document with questions to ask your doctor.

Treatments you can Choose or Refuse at the End of Life

Medical treatment at the end of life generally falls into three main categories – full treatment, life prolonging, and comfort measures. You can usually choose or refuse these treatments at any time. In most cases, you can also try a treatment and then stop it if you don't regain the quality of life you want.

Full Treatment including CPR and Ventilation:

CPR, machines and medications to keep your heart and lungs going when they don't work on their own.

- **Cardiopulmonary resuscitation** (CPR) tries to restart the heart and lungs after your heart stops beating. Then you are usually moved to a hospital's intensive care unit (ICU), where you may be put on a respirator.

- A **respirator** or ventilator pumps oxygen into your lungs through a tube inserted in your windpipe. In some cases, normal breathing can never be restored.

Life Prolonging Medical Treatments:

Involves treatment and machines to prolong your life when your condition can't be reversed or cured. There are many treatments, from IVs and antibiotics to chemotherapy and surgery which can be considered life prolonging, but two deserve more discussion because they are can be controversial at the end of life.

- **Tube feeding** provides food and fluids through a tube or IV if you cannot chew or swallow. Tube feeding can help keep you alive if you cannot eat; without it your body shuts down. At the end of life, tube feeding may cause retention of fluid and increase discomfort.
- **Kidney dialysis** cleans your blood by machine when your kidneys no longer work. Dialysis can prolong your life but cannot restore kidney function.
- **Comfort Measures:** Various treatments to keep you comfortable. These can be used in conjunction with other treatments, but may also be used by themselves when other treatments are no longer helpful.
- **Hospice care** provides comfort care, such as oxygen, pain medication, food and fluids by mouth, bathing, and emotional and practical support for the patient and family. Hospice care is given during the last stages of a terminal condition. Death is allowed to occur naturally.
- **Pain medications**, such as morphine and other narcotics, may be given to keep pain under control.
- **Alternative and complementary treatments:** Treatments such as massage, acupuncture, reflexology, relaxation techniques and others, may relieve symptoms. It is a good idea to ask your healthcare provider whether there are any contraindications for these.

Click here to download a questionnaire to help you make the treatment decisions you would want.

Next Steps

- Obtain an **advance directive**.
- Communicate your wishes to both your family and your healthcare provider by completing an advance directive and through conversation. It is helpful if you schedule an appointment with your doctor specifically for this discussion.

If you are having a problem with your medical decisions being honored

Since deciding whether or not to accept or reject a treatment depends on personal values as well as the medical value of a treatment, there is room for disagreement among individuals on the medical care team, the family and the patient. Most of these conflicts come about because of the difficulty in communicating and understanding another's values completely. Most of these conflicts can be resolved by speaking directly to the people involved. Case management may be able to help by facilitating a discussion with you, your family and your caregivers to find out what is most important to each person involved.

For situations not resolved through conversation... Like most hospitals today, Yampa Valley Medical Center has an Ethics Committee. Patients, family members, and healthcare providers may request a consultation to help resolve ethical issues. A consultation may be initiated by contacting the Administrator-on-Call through a nursing supervisor or case manager.

What is the Ethics Committee? The Ethics Committee is a group of healthcare professionals and community members with a particular interest in healthcare ethics. The Committee consults on ethical issues, reviews policies related to patient rights, and develops educational materials and programs on healthcare ethics for the healthcare community. The committee is ready and available to assist you if you feel your decisions about care are not being honored.



Making Healthcare Decisions

Most of us are not medical experts, however we do know what is important to us. By reviewing the questions below you can help make sure that your medical care is consistent with what is most important to you.

Questions to ask yourself about your values

Rate the following questions according to their importance to you.	Very	Somewhat	Not Very
Care for myself without being a burden to others			
Get out of bed every day			
Be physically independent			
Recognize my family and friends			
Talk to and understand others			
Make decisions for myself			
Remain in my home as long as I live			
Live without constant or severe pain			
Live without being dependent on medical treatment or machines to keep me alive			
Be financially independent			
Leave money to my family or a cause I believe in			
Be faithful to my beliefs			
Live as long as possible			
Receive all medical treatment possible			
Die naturally, without lingering			



Making Healthcare Decisions

Questions to ask your doctor about treatment:

- **What is my prognosis?** Is this a short-term illness or is it a chronic illness that will impact your life for a long time?
- **How will this treatment affect me?**
- **What are the benefits and risks?**
- **Are there side effects?** Are the side effects short term or long term, common or rare? How severe are they?
- **Will I return to normal?**
- **After the treatment will I have a reduced capacity to do the things that I want to do?**
- **Will I have to undergo some form of treatment for the rest of my life?**
- **What can I expect in the future?** Are there choices that I may have to make in the future that I should be thinking about now?



Making Healthcare Decisions

Questions to ask yourself about your treatment

When you consider the medical care you would want in a life-threatening situation, try to focus on the benefits and risks of each treatment. Think about the quality of life you would want during or after treatment. Imagine yourself in each of these situations and ask yourself what your treatment would be. Mark your choice yes or no in each box.

Which treatment would you prefer for the following situations?	CPR	Respirator	Tube feeding	Kidney Dialysis	Pain Medication	Comfort care only
An unexpected condition and no other severe medical condition						
An unexpected condition with another severe medical condition (such as heart disease or a stroke)						
A chronic condition under treatment						
A chronic condition that treatment can no longer control						
A terminal illness in which treatment keeps me active and comfortable						
A terminal illness in which treatment does not keep me active and comfortable						
An irreversible coma or persistent vegetative state with no other medical condition						
An irreversible coma or persistent vegetative state and a chronic or terminal illness (such as kidney failure)						