
Decision-making in hospital

Summary

- An advance care plan outlines what treatment and care you want and can be used when you are unable to communicate what you want.
 - A medical power of attorney is a person who you choose to make medical decisions for you in case you are not able to.
 - When you are in hospital, there is support and information available to help you make decisions.
 - Talk about your options with your doctors, family and friends.
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There are things to think about so that you can make good decisions in hospital. Making important decisions as a patient can be daunting. Some decisions are best made before you go in and others can only be made while you are in hospital. The support of family, friends and your doctor can help.

Before you go to hospital

There will be some decisions that you make before your hospital visit, such as what the costs will be and what you would like to document about your future care needs.

Financial decisions

Some of the decisions that you make before you go to hospital will affect how much you will need to pay for your treatment. Consider:

- Will you be treated in the public or private system?
- Will you choose to be a private patient in a public hospital?

Documenting your healthcare wishes

There are several things to consider when it comes to documenting your wishes for your future medical care, including:

- Do you have an advance care plan in place that states your preferences for medical care in the event that you do not have the capacity to communicate?
- Do you have an enduring power of attorney (medical) that gives the decision-making power about your care to someone else in the event that you are unable to communicate your wishes?
- Do you have an up-to-date will?

While you are in hospital

You will need to make some decisions around your treatment and care while you are a patient in hospital, but there is help available if you would like it.

Getting support to make decisions

There is support available to help you make decisions while you are in hospital. These include:

- hospital staff, including your doctor or surgeon and patient representatives
- family and friends

Treatment and care decisions

When you agree to have surgery, you will be asked to give your 'informed consent'. In an emergency situation where you cannot communicate effectively, your consent to treatment is implied. Remember:

- It is your doctor's responsibility to clearly explain your treatment options, including the risks, so you can make
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informed choices.

- It is your right to seek a second opinion about your treatment options.

When making decisions, try to:

- consider your decision (including what it is, your reason for making it and when you need to make it).
- explore your options (list the main benefits and risks of each).
- identify what you need in order to make your decision (think about your knowledge about the issue, what values you hold to influence the decision, if you have enough support to make the decision and if you are certain of making the best choice for you).
- ask your nurse or doctor the questions you need answered to be able to make your decision.
- plan the next steps based on your needs (make a list of issues or factors you would still like to explore).

Leaving hospital against advice

Even though you might have to wait for care or you may not be happy with your care, leaving hospital against the advice of your treating doctor can be dangerous. If your condition is terminal, have you thought about where you want to spend your final days? Have you communicated this to your family?

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your surgeon

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