

Decision Aid Summary: Peace of Mind: Personal Stories about Advance Directives

Summary

Situations may occur when people may no longer be able to speak for themselves or ask for the type of medical treatment they want. It's hard to imagine ourselves in such a situation, and it can be difficult to imagine having to make decisions for somebody who can't speak for themselves. To make difficult medical decisions easier, the Informed Medical Decisions Foundation has developed a Shared Decision-Making® program called **Peace of Mind: Personal Stories about Advance Directives**.

This program is intended for:

1. People who have been diagnosed with a terminal condition or a serious chronic condition potentially leading to a shortened lifespan.
2. Healthy people and their families who are thinking about their wishes for end of life care.

This program discusses advance directives, which are legal documents that allow people to decide what type of care they would want if they ever became unable to speak for themselves. They also allow people to choose someone to make medical decisions on their behalf. Through patient stories, the program shows how an advance directive can help avoid potential physical suffering and mental distress of patients and their families.

The program describes the different types of advance directives, including medical powers of attorney (health care proxy), living wills and treatment preference documents. It includes guidance on how to develop an advance directive and explanations of key medical scenarios that may occur. Because advance directives may not cover every medical scenario, the program also emphasizes the importance of talking with a loved one about values and preferences for care at the end of life.

Interviews with real patients explore the impact of either having or not having had an advance directive in critical medical situations. Several of these people have experienced critical care themselves, while others describe the decisions made about end of life care by or for their family members.

This program was developed with our production partner, Health Dialog. It is available as a DVD and a booklet.

The Foundation has developed a related program, [Looking Ahead: Choices for Medical Care When You're Seriously Ill](#), with more information about treatment options for people who have been diagnosed with a serious illness and their families.