

## Important Documents for Seniors

Healthcare Decisions Day, April 16, is designed to raise public awareness of the need to plan ahead for healthcare decisions related to end of life care and medical decision-making whenever patients are unable to speak for themselves, and to encourage the specific use of Advance Directives to communicate these important healthcare decisions. It is very confusing to most of us to understand all the different documents that we should consider executing. Here is a list of some of them. You would need an attorney to complete some of them, but you can process your own Advance Directives and DNR (the latter requires your doctor's signature as well):



health care decisions that must be made for you, if you are unable to make those health care decisions for yourself. An Advanced Healthcare Directive, also known as a healthcare proxy or healthcare Power of Attorney, gives the person you choose the authority to make healthcare decisions on your behalf if you become unable to do so for yourself. One of its most important benefits is that it can prevent the court proceeding known as guardianship. The end result of a guardianship process is that the court chooses who will make healthcare decisions for you in the event of incapacity. Unfortunately, the person chosen by the court might not be someone you would have wanted to make these decisions. In addition, the guardianship process is time-consuming, expensive and stressful for everyone involved.

### Advance Medical Directives

**If you become too ill to make decisions about your medical care, will your health care providers and your family know what your wishes are?**

You can make your healthcare wishes clear. An Advance Medical Directive, sometimes called an Advance Health Care Directive, is documentation which allows you to indicate your preferences regarding medical treatment if you are unable to articulate those preferences yourself. In an Advance Medical Directive, you can make your wishes clear regarding specific surgical procedures or treatments that you want to have provided, or withheld, as part of your care, such as artificially administered fluids or nutrition, organ or tissue donation, and resuscitation efforts.

An Advance Medical Directive also can be used to appoint an individual to act as your agent for

The quality of your medical care will not be influenced by your having an Advance Medical Directive in place. If your health provider is unable, as a matter of conscience, to comply with your directives, all reasonable steps must be taken to transfer your care to another provider.

### What is a Living Will?

A living will is often created in conjunction with a Power of Attorney for Healthcare/Advance Directive. This document specifies the medical services the incapacitated or terminally ill patient does or does not want to receive in an end of life situation. For example, a living will might forbid the use of certain types of medical treatment that you would not want utilized to prolong your life by extraordinary means, or forego the provision of food or water if these must be supplied using tubes or other invasive medical techniques. A properly designed estate plan should contain both a power of attorney for healthcare and a living will.