

What is a Power of Attorney?

A Power of Attorney, also known as a POA, is a document created to appoint an individual or organization to handle your financial affairs while you are incapacitated or unable to make decisions yourself. This authority should include fixing taxes, selling real estate, acquiring life or health insurance, and entering into contracts. A well drafted POA should also include provisions for long-term care planning, such as your agent's ability to create and fund revocable and irrevocable trusts, make gifts and apply for programs such as Medicaid and VA Aid and Attendance benefits.

What is a Will?

A Will is a legal document that controls the distribution of property when a person passes away. It allows you, rather than formulas set by the Virginia Statutes, to specify, "Who gets what." A Will can also allow you to name the person or institution (called the executor) you want to manage your estate upon your death, allow real estate and other assets to be sold upon your death without a court proceeding, leave gifts to charity, and name a guardian for your minor or disabled children. A Will can also allow your spouse to become immediately eligible for Medicaid while preserving your assets for his or her benefit after you pass away. (Adapted from Hook Law Center and the Law Office of Angela Manz)

What's a DNR?

The Virginia Durable Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order form is a statement letting emergency service personnel know that a patient does not want to receive life-saving treatment during a medical emergency where they are not breathing or do not have a heartbeat.

"Durable Do Not Resuscitate Order" is a written document signed by the doctor and the patient authorizing the withholding of

cardiopulmonary resuscitation in the event of cardiac or respiratory arrest. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation shall include cardiac compression, endotracheal intubation and other advanced airway management, artificial ventilation, defibrillation and related procedures. This form can now be printed from the State of Virginia website and has to be signed by the doctor.

What is a P.O.S.T?

A POST (Physician Orders for Scope of Treatment) form is a physician-signed order form which communicates and puts into action treatment preferences for patients who are nearing the end of their lives. POST is based on the ethical principle of respect and patient autonomy and the legal principle of patient self-determination. All competent adults have the right to make their own healthcare decisions. POST is designed to help healthcare professionals know and honor the treatment wishes of their patients.

POST is intended for those with a terminal illness, or those dealing with a chronic progressive illness, like advanced heart or lung disease or cancer, that has spread. Those who are frail and elderly may benefit from a POST, as well. An individual can only obtain this form from a doctor. It should be completed only after the patient (or, if the patient lacks capacity, the patient's health care agent) has an advance care planning discussion with a physician. The POST form also has a Do Not Resuscitate section that can stand in place of a separate DNR form.

Take the time to learn about these various documents, check to see what you already have or still need, and have the necessary discussions with your loved ones so they will know what your wishes are.