

# Advanced Directives

## Written Instructions About Your Health Care Wishes

Advance directives are written instructions about your health care wishes. They are used when you are unable to communicate your health care choices to your caregivers.

The Patient Self-Determination Act requires all health care institutions to inform patients of their rights to accept or reject treatment and to assist patients who want help writing instructions, or “advance directives,” should they become unable to communicate their wishes to a doctor.

The decision to sign an advance directive is personal and important. The most common form of advance directive is a health care power of attorney. Appropriately executed advance directives should be presented at the time of admission. AnMed Health will honor legally valid advanced directives and incorporate them into your treatment plan. None of these documents requires an attorney’s involvement.

The following are a few frequently asked questions about advance directives.

### **1. What types of advance directives are used in South Carolina?**

The three types of advance directives approved by the South Carolina legislature are the South Carolina Healthcare Power of Attorney, the Declaration of a Desire for a Natural Death and Five Wishes.

### **2. What is a health care power of attorney?**

Health care power of attorney gives one person, known as an agent, the authority to make all decisions about your health care should you become incapable of doing so. Health care power of attorney also allows you to give specific instructions to your agent about decisions near the end of your life. You can state a desire to be allowed to die a natural death if your condition is terminal or if you are in a state of permanent unconsciousness. The agent should be a person you trust and one who knows your wishes about the medical care you would or would not want to receive in various circumstances. Alternate agents can be named on the form in case your first choice is unable or unwilling to serve.

### **3. Who can sign an advance directive and does it have to be notarized?**

To sign an advance directive, you must be at least 18 years old and have the capacity to understand an advance directive. You must be able to understand your illness and treatment plan and communicate your wishes to your caregivers. A health care power of attorney requires two witnesses who are not family members and can be notarized (if desired). The Declaration of a Desire for a Natural Death and Five Wishes require two witnesses and notarization. Under South Carolina law, there are restrictions to completing an advance directive if you are pregnant.

### **4. What if you change your mind?**

The health care power of attorney or any other advance directive can be revoked or changed at any time by informing your agent and your doctor that you’ve changed your mind. You are strongly advised to make a new one and destroy all copies of the old one.

### **5. Where should I keep an advance directive?**

Keep the original document in a safe place where your family members can find it. Give a copy to your agent, your doctor, your local hospital, your lawyer and clergy. Do not put all copies in a safe deposit box.

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### 6. Does AnMed Health provide assistance with advance directives?

AnMed Health's patient advocates and chaplains are trained to educate and facilitate the creation of a health care power of attorney or other legally valid advance directive. You can get forms and assistance free of charge by contacting either department. You can speak directly to your physician about advance directives and your health care wishes.

### 7. Are out-of-state documents valid in South Carolina?

An advance directive from another state is probably acceptable in South Carolina. However, it is recommended that you sign one of the three forms approved by the South Carolina Legislature. To be safe, any advance directive signed in another state should be reviewed by your attorney.

Remember, it's important to discuss your thoughts and feelings about life support with members of your family. The best time to have these discussions and to complete an advance directive is before being admitted to a hospital or nursing home.

**For more information, go to [www.AnMedHealth.org](http://www.AnMedHealth.org),  
view our video at [www.youtube.com/AnMedHealth1](http://www.youtube.com/AnMedHealth1)  
or call any of the following offices:**

Patient Advocate Office.....864.512.1404

Spiritual Care ..... 864.512.1555, pager 3636

Senior Solutions.....864.332.5681

Lieutenant Governor's Office on Aging..... 1.800.868.9095