

ADVANCE MEDICAL DIRECTIVES

What is an Advance Medical Directive?

An Advance Medical Directive is an important document when it comes to planning for your future. Just as you would create a will to make future plans for your property, you can create Advance Medical Directives to make future plans for your health care needs and desires. Two types of Advance Medical Directives that are commonly used are a Living Will and a Health Care Power of Attorney.

What is a Living Will?

A living will is a written declaration in which you state in advance your wishes about the use of life-prolonging medical care if you become terminally ill and unable to communicate your wishes. It lets your wishes be carried out even if you become unable to state them. Living wills typically become effective when you sustain a terminal medical condition from which you will not recover. In this medical condition, you will not survive without the use of life-sustaining treatment such as a respirator or intravenous feeding. Creating a living will allows you to express your desires regarding the use of these medical treatments before the treatments become necessary. A living will can also prevent your family from being put in a difficult situation by having to guess as to what your wishes are. A living will is an important planning tool that allows both you and your family to be better prepared in the event of future medical emergencies.

What is a Medical Power of Attorney?

A medical power of attorney allows you to appoint someone to make healthcare decisions for you, if you are unable to make those decisions yourself. One advantage of a medical power of attorney is it covers all types of medical situations and decisions. Because medical decisions are extremely important, it is typical for a close and trusted relative or friend to be appointed as the agent for making healthcare decisions.

Is it a good idea to have both a Living Will and Medical Power of Attorney?

Yes. Living wills typically cover only a limited number of medical conditions, while a medical power of attorney covers most medical conditions. With both documents, they only become effective once you can no longer make medical decisions for yourself. The two documents can also work in conjunction with each other. In the past, medical professionals have been reluctant to terminate life support even if the patient had a validly executed living will. However, if the medical professional has a living will, as well as the instructions of the health care agent appointed through the healthcare power of attorney, it is more likely that your wishes will be carried out.

If you have questions, contact the Fort Bliss Legal Assistance Office at (915) 568-7141 or usarmy.bliss.hqda-otjag.mesg.bliss-legal-assistance-office@army.mil for an appointment to speak with an attorney.