

Advance care planning helps design a treatment strategy or plan for our health care providers to follow when we have a serious, advanced illness. This planning allows health care professionals to understand our goals of care so they match the type of care that we receive. There are documents that allow us to put this information in writing to prevent misunderstandings. The information in these documents needs to be discussed while we are able to actively participate in the conversation so that our loved ones and care providers understand our wishes/preferences for health care and the personal goals, values, religious or cultural beliefs that affect our decisions.

ADVANCE DIRECTIVE

The advance directive, also known as a living will, is a legal document that provides instructions specifying what kind of treatment should be given to us when we are no longer able to make decisions or speak for ourselves. It is restrictive, as it only goes into effect if we have lost the ability to make decisions and are terminally ill. It is usually completed in advance of any known illness. It may be very specific or very vague. Because we complete it ourselves, unless there are other known facts, it must be honored. An advance directive does not need to be notarized, but must be witnessed by two people in order to be valid.

HEALTH CARE POWER OF ATTORNEY

The health care power of attorney authorizes someone else to make decisions for us when we are no longer able to make decisions or speak for ourselves. To become valid, the health care power of attorney document must be witnessed by two people.

In Louisiana, there is a specific order of who can make these decisions for us if no written instructions are available. The personal health care representative is defined in R.S. 40:1299.64.2 (9) and means a person who has authority in accordance with Louisiana law to act on behalf of an individual who is an adult or emancipated minor in making decisions related to health care because of incapacity.

LOUISIANA PHYSICIAN ORDERS FOR SCOPE OF TREATMENT (LaPOST)

The LaPOST document is more than an advance directive or a health care power of attorney. It is a physician's order that outlines our wishes for medical treatment and goals of care developed when we have a serious, advanced illness, and can be used to translate a living will into a physician's order when we have such a condition. The LaPOST document must be discussed by us and/or our health care representatives and be signed by a physician. The document lists some of the medical treatments we can choose to have or not have. Our doctors and health care teams can help us decide which treatment options will best help us reach the goals we have for our care. When it is completed, it must be honored by all health care professionals. It then provides a roadmap for our medical care when we have serious life limiting illnesses.

The LaPOST document can be completed by our personal health care representatives if we are no longer able to speak for ourselves.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT LaPOST?

For more information about LaPOST, or to download a copy of the document, visit la-post.org.