

### **Advance Care Plans Provide Peace of Mind for Aging Parents and their Adult Children**

You taught your toddler to not be afraid of the dark. You helped your teenager deal with difficult times in high school. The parental instinct to protect your children never fades. Rather, it evolves as your children grow up, and you grow older.

Age may make you feel there is little you can do to shelter your adult children from life's hard knocks. But you can protect them from the emotional trauma of having to make life-and-death decisions on your behalf by having the difficult discussion about advanced care plans before the plans become urgent. There is no good time to have this discussion but the time of an impending crisis is clearly the worst time for the discussion to be held and many times that discussion is ongoing without the input of the most important person – you.

A variety of health issues associated with aging may leave you unable to care for yourself as you would wish. Making an advance care plan can ease your worries – and your family's emotional burden – about your own care. A written document – an advance care plan – can help make sure your care is set up to respect your personal wishes, cultural and religious needs and individual health requirements. Having your wishes defined in writing can give you peace of mind and relieve your family of making difficult decisions on your behalf.

“Regardless of your medical history, an advance care plan is a good idea for all adults,” says Dr. Clyde Yancy, education committee chairman of the Heart Failure Society of America (HFSA), a nonprofit educational and research organization. “Discussing these issues can be difficult – even impossible if a crisis is ongoing. The goal is to make it easier for the patient and the family if the situation does happen.”

Commonly, advance care plans have five key elements – an advance care directive, a do-not-resuscitate order, a living will, a health care power of attorney, and a financial plan.

#### **Advance Care Directive**

This document will provide clear directions regarding your medical treatment and can include a living will, a durable health care power of attorney and a statement about organ donation.

#### **Do-Not-Resuscitate Order**

This part of the plan tells doctors, nurses and other rescue personnel what they should or should not do when a person stops breathing or when his or her heart stops beating or is beating so irregularly it threatens life. The order can include instructions on whether to use different types of methods to revive a person.

#### **Living Will**

A living will is usually used during a terminal illness when a person is unable to tell someone what he or she wants to do. It is a legal document that lets a person who is unable to participate in decisions about their medical care express his wishes about life-sustaining treatment.

#### **Health Care Power of Attorney**

This allows you to appoint another person to make legally binding decisions for you. A health care power of attorney lets someone make all health care decisions for you including the decision to refuse life-sustaining treatment if you are unable to make the decision for yourself.

#### **Financial Plan**

Health care can be very expensive, especially when treating chronic illnesses. A financial plan is created to help families deal with issues such as paying for medicines, doctor visits and hospital stays.

“Telling people what you want helps them care for you in a way that best meets your wishes,” says Yancy. “Even if you do not create a written advance care plan, it is important to let your health care providers, family and other caretakers know your wishes regarding the care you wish to receive when you are unable to participate in those discussions.” Creating an advance care plan does not mean that death is imminent, rather it enriches living as it relieves the stress that one of the most important life decisions might create.

To learn more about advance care planning visit the Heart Failure Society of America at [www.abouthf.org](http://www.abouthf.org). (posted ARA Content 12/08)