

Caregiver's Corner



Decision-Making Tips for the At-Home Caregiver

Advanced Directives - Is It Time?

Just what are advanced directives? They are decisions made in advance that direct others in regard to personal health care decisions, should one become ill and unable to make decisions. This includes who will oversee healthcare, and what kind of healthcare is provided.

If your loved one has not prepared for a debilitating illness, perhaps it is time. Your loved one may be faced with difficult questions, such as... Who would you want to oversee your well-being? What kind of treatments would you choose? In the event your heart stops beating, would you want CPR performed? Do you want to be an organ donor? These are all questions which may be handled by "advanced directives."

If your loved one has a clear vision of whom they want to oversee their care, and what kind of medical decisions they would make for themselves, the next step is to commit those visions to written form. Standardized forms (Durable Power of Attorney and Living Will) are available at no cost from health care professionals, such as your physician, local hospital, or area skilled nursing facility. While some people choose to seek an attorney to handle such affairs, when standardized forms are used, an attorney is not needed for the paperwork to be legal.

As a caregiver, you may wish to encourage your loved one to begin thinking about the future. You may wish to encourage other family members to become involved, however, remember, it is ultimately your loved one's decision and their wishes should be honored. Once the decision has been made, it should be committed to writing, and family, close friends, and of course, a physician should be notified. Copies of advanced directives should be kept with other important papers and medical information.



When To Seek Emergency Care

Only a doctor can diagnose medical problems, but you can protect you or your loved-one's health by learning to recognize certain symptoms that may require medical attention. Certain situations are so alarming that the need for emergency care — or even an ambulance — is obvious. Know which symptoms to watch for.

How can you tell the difference between a true emergency and a minor problem? According to the American College of Emergency Physicians, the following are warning signs of a true medical emergency:

- ◆ Difficulty breathing, shortness of breath
- ◆ Chest or upper abdominal pain or pressure
- ◆ Fainting
- ◆ Sudden dizziness, weakness or change in vision
- ◆ Sudden, severe pain anywhere in the body
- ◆ Bleeding that won't stop
- ◆ Severe or persistent vomiting
- ◆ Coughing or vomiting blood

Should You Call an Ambulance?

When should you call an ambulance instead of driving to the E.R.?



- ◆ Are you alone and need assistance to handle the situation?
- ◆ Does the condition appear life-threatening?
- ◆ Could the condition **become** life-threatening on the way to the ER?
- ◆ Would traffic or route cause life-threatening delays?
- ◆ Could moving the victim cause further injury?
- ◆ Does the victim need the skills or equipment of paramedics?

By remaining calm and remembering these tips, you will be prepared to handle an emergency when the time comes. Most areas are equipped for emergency response by dialing "911". Be prepared - know the number in your area.