



NORTHSIDE HOSPITAL

**GEORGIA ADVANCE
DIRECTIVE FOR HEALTH
CARE**



NORTHSIDE HOSPITAL

Advance Directives: “Your Right To Decide”

Georgia law gives competent adults the right to make choices about their own health care. This includes the right to choose medical care, to refuse certain care or to stop care altogether. Georgia law also lets you choose someone to make health care choices for you if you are unable or unwilling to do so.

The best way for you to be in control of your medical treatment is to sign a ‘Georgia Advance Directive For Health Care’ before you have an illness that prevents you from communicating your wishes.

What is an ‘Advance Directive’?

An advance directive is a legal form that lists your wishes about medical care and treatment. You may also name someone to make choices about your medical care and treatment if you can't. These forms are called advance directives since they are written in advance of a serious illness, to let other people know your wishes.

Before July 1, 2007, Georgia law recognized two kinds of ‘advance directives’: a *Living Will* and a *Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care*.

Recent changes in Georgia law combined these two forms into one simple form called ‘Georgia Advance Directive For Health Care’.

What happens if I completed a Living Will or Durable Power of Attorney for Health care before the new law?

An advance directive that was completed before the change in Georgia law is still legal. You may change to the new form at any time, but you do not have to do so.

Do I have to have an advance directive?

No. Federal law makes it against the law for a hospital to refuse to take care of you because you do not have an advance directive.

By law, the hospital must ask if you have an advance directive and give you information about state laws and hospital policy on advance directives.

What will happen if I decide not to have an advance directive?

As long as you are still alert and able to speak for yourself, you will be able to make your own decisions about your medical care.

If you are no longer able to make decisions and do not have an advance directive, Georgia law allows your closest relative to agree to treatment for you.

If I have an advance directive from another state, will it be honored at Northside?

Northside will honor an advance directive from another state if the advance directive also meets the requirements of Georgia law.

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What is the ‘Georgia Advance Directive For Health Care’?

The ‘Georgia Advance Directive For Health Care’ is a legal document that you complete. It tells your doctor and your healthcare providers:

- PART I:
How to choose a person to make decisions about your healthcare if you are unable or unwilling to do so. This person is called a ‘health care agent’.

Who can I name as my ‘health care agent’?

You may name any adult as your healthcare agent. Choose a person who knows about your wishes and whom you trust to carry out your wishes. If you name your spouse and then are divorced, the right of the ex-spouse to make decisions for you is automatically taken away when the divorce is final. The only person who cannot be your agent is your doctor or healthcare provider.

What will my ‘health care agent’ do?

Your health care agent will be able to make health care decisions for your care or treatment if you are unable or unwilling to do so. You may also choose for your health care agent to make decisions about organ and body donation and autopsies after you die.

What can’t my ‘health care agent’ do?

Your agent would not be allowed to consent to psychosurgery, sterilization or hospitalization for mental illness or substance abuse. In addition, your physician can administer treatment for your comfort or to relieve pain without the permission of your agent.

May I ask more than one person to be my health care agent?

It is not a good idea to name more than one person to make decisions for you at the same time. This can cause problems if they do not agree about treatment choices. It would be wise, however, to name a second person in the event the primary person is unable or unwilling to do so at the time he or she is needed.

- PART II:
How to direct healthcare providers as to what you want. If you do or do not want life-sustaining treatments if you become terminally ill or are in a permanent unconscious state you may so state in your advanced directive. These are treatments that will not cure your terminal illness or make you better, but they may postpone death. Some examples of these are cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) to return your heart beat and breathing and putting you on a machine to help you breathe. You can also decide if you want to receive food or liquids by a tube if you cannot eat or drink.

What is a terminal condition and permanent unconscious state?

A terminal condition is a condition that is incurable. Medical treatment will only postpone death, not make you better. Without treatment death may occur in a short time. A permanent unconscious state means that you are in an irreversible or incurable state and you are not aware of your surroundings or yourself.

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May I name particular treatments that I don’t want?

If you want to name particular treatments that you would or would not want, you may do so. *For example, you may want to state your treatment preferences regarding medications to fight infection or provide pain relief, surgery, amputation, blood transfusion, or kidney dialysis.*

May I name particular treatments that I do want?

Yes. Some people feel that they would want everything possible done for them if there were any hope of keeping them alive.

- PART III:
How to change the agent or the terms of the advance directive if you change your mind.

Can I change my mind after I write an advance directive?

You may change or cancel your advance directive at any time. This means you can change the terms or change your agent for health care decisions. To change your advance directive, tear up the original advance directive and complete a new form, have it signed and witnessed. Provide copies to your health care agent, doctor or healthcare provider, and relatives. If you want to cancel your advance directive, tear up the original and let your health care agent, doctor or healthcare provider, and relatives know that you have canceled your advance directive.

Will an advance directive always be followed?

Generally yes, if it complies with Georgia Law. If your health care provider is unable to follow your advance directives for moral, religious, or professional reasons, even though they comply with the Georgia Law, they must tell you or your agent right away. Then they must help make plans to transfer your care to another doctor or facility that is able to honor your wishes. In an emergency it may be impossible at the time to know your chances for survival or recovery. Once the emergency is over, your healthcare providers can better determine your condition and your advance directive will be looked at and followed.

If I am pregnant, will my wishes in my advance directive be carried out?

That depends. If the baby is developed enough that the baby could survive delivery, any instructions that would result in withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining treatments would not be honored. Even if the baby is not developed enough to survive delivery, your treatment choices would not be honored unless you initial the statement on the **‘Georgia Advance Directive For Health** form that you want life sustaining treatment withheld or withdrawn when you are pregnant with a non-viable infant.

Is there a time limit on how long my advance directive will be legal?

There is no time limit on an advance directive.