

April Showers Draft Your Health Powers: Celebrating National Healthcare Decisions Day.

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April is known for many things including: April Fool's Day, Earth Day, spring weather, and baseball. The doldrums of winter are finally behind us and we can look toward the warmer months filled with vacations, cookouts, and landscaping. What April should also be known for is a vital initiative to promote the importance of advance health care planning. To this end, you should consider celebrating National Healthcare Decisions Day ("NHDD") on April 16th by entering into, or expanding your own advance health care plan.

The Importance of Health Care Planning:

While a significant portion of my practice is dedicated to the financial aspects of managing health care, there is a large emphasis placed on setting up proper advance health care plans. There is no more personal decision you can make than how you want your health care to be managed when you are no longer capable of making decisions for yourself. Considerations including: care management, preference of medical procedures, and religious/cultural needs necessitate a great depth of thought and preparation. While state and federal laws have done their best to create systems to approximate individuals' wishes, it is vital to plan ahead to ensure that your specific needs are met.

Description and Mission of NHDD:

National Healthcare Decisions Day was established in 2016 to bring awareness, information, and empowerment with respect to making advance health care decisions. Per its mission statement, "NDHH is an initiative to encourage patients to express their wishes regarding healthcare and for providers and facilities to respect those wishes, whatever they may be." The initiative springs from the Conversation Project, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to aiding patients in making and communicating end-of-life care decisions. The event aims to promote widely available, accessible advance care directives for the general public and to dispel the misinformation and stigma surrounding this type of planning. NHDD will work with healthcare facilities to serve as venues for public engagement. The initiative will also spread to many churches, synagogues, and mosques around the country to introduce advance directive concepts to their congregations.

Documents to Consider Integrating into Your Plan:

In the spirit of NHDD, it is important to draft the correct documentation to make your health care wishes known. In preparing ahead for health care, there are a variety of documents that, when employed properly, will best crystalize your wishes and needs. These documents are as follows:

- *Health Care Power of Attorney*: A Health Care Power of Attorney allows you as the Principal to appoint any individual as your Agent to make health care decisions on your behalf without court intervention. This document becomes active in the event you are incapacitated or can no longer communicate for yourself;
- *Living Will*: A Living Will allows you to set forth your wishes with respect to the management of your health care when you are in an end-stage medical condition. This vital document allows you to pick and choose which medical procedures you wish to maintain or cease when you are dying; and
- *Pennsylvania Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment ("POLST")*: A POLST is a medical order that gives you greater control over your end-of-life care. This document covers circumstances similar to your Living Will, but is signed by your doctor as a medical order and placed in your medical file.

Executing the above documents will allow you to rest easy knowing that you have taken the necessary steps to communicate your health care wishes to trusted loved ones and your doctor as well as appointed people to advocate on your behalf.

What Should You Do:

Now that the importance of Advance Health Directives has been established, the next step is to enact your plan. To participate in National Healthcare Decisions Day, you can take the following actions:

- Visit the initiative at www.nhdd.org to learn more, join the initiative, and organize the event in your community;
- Attend NHDD events in your community; and
- Take the necessary steps to set forth your advance care decisions.

National Healthcare Decisions Day is an important initiative to help provide vital services and information to patients and individuals looking to ensure their end-of-life care is managed properly. Initiatives such as this, coupled with a well-drafted estate plan will provide you with the knowledge, documents, and structure to achieve your health care goals. So, while we move into spring, be sure to keep these concepts in mind and attend National Healthcare Decisions Day on April 16th.