



## **PLANNING IN ADVANCE FOR YOUR MEDICAL TREATMENT**

### **Your Right to Decide About Treatment**

Adults in New York State have the right to accept or refuse medical treatment, including life-sustaining treatment. Our Constitution and state laws protect this right. This means that you have the right to request or consent to treatment, to refuse treatment before it has started, and to have treatment stopped once it has begun.

### **Planning in Advance**

Sometimes because of illness or injury people are unable to talk to a doctor and decide about treatment for themselves. You may wish to plan in advance to make sure that your wishes about treatment will be followed if you become unable to decide for yourself for a short or long time period. If you don't plan ahead, family members or other people close to you may not be allowed to make decisions for you and follow your wishes.

In New York State, appointing someone you can trust to decide about treatment if you become unable to decide for yourself is the best way to protect your treatment wishes and concerns. You have the right to appoint someone by filling out a form called a Health Care Proxy. A copy of the form and information about the Health Care Proxy are available from your health care provider.

If you have no one you can appoint to decide for you, or do not want to appoint someone, you can also give specific instructions about treatment in advance. Those instructions can be written, and often referred to as a Living Will.

You should understand that general instructions about refusing treatment, even if written down, may not be effective. Your instructions must clearly cover the treatment decisions that must be made. For example, if you just write down that you do not want "heroic measures", the instructions may not be specific enough. You should say the kind of treatment that you do not want, such as a respirator or chemotherapy, and describe the medical condition when you would refuse the treatment, such as when you are terminally ill or permanently unconscious with no hope of recovering. You can also give instructions orally by discussing your treatment wishes with your doctor, family members or other close to you.

Putting things in writing is safer than simply speaking to people, but neither method is as effective as appointing someone to decide for you. It is often hard for people to know in advance what will happen to them or what their medical needs will be in the future. If you choose someone to make decisions for you, that person can talk to your doctor and make decisions that they believe you would have wanted or that are best for you, when needed. If you appoint someone and also have instructions about treatment in a Living Will, in the space provided on the Health Care Proxy form itself, or some other manner, the person you select can use these instructions as guidance to make the right decision for you.

### **Deciding About Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation & DNR**

Your right to decide about treatment also includes the right to decide about cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). CPR is emergency treatment to restart the heart and lungs when your breathing or circulation stop. Sometimes doctors and patients decide in advance that CPR should not be provided, and the doctor gives the medical staff an order not to resuscitate (DNR order). If your physical or mental condition prevents you from deciding about CPR, someone you appoint, your family, members, or others close to you can decide. A brochure on CPR and your rights under New York State Law is available from your health care provider.

### **Deciding About DNI**

Do not Intubate (DNI) means that no breathing tube will be placed in the throat in the event of breathing difficulties or respiratory arrest. If you stop breathing, you will not be placed on an artificial breathing machine, and the insertion of a tube or mechanical ventilation will not be initiated.

The DNI order can be a separate Advance Directive from the DNR order, but in most cases they are ordered together.