

## Making Tomorrow's Health Care Decisions Today

(NAPSA)—When it comes to making decisions about the kind of health care they'll receive in the future, many Americans are willing to put off those decisions for as long as possible. That's especially true when it comes to crafting what's known as an advance directive.

An advance directive is a document that names a person to be your spokesperson and who can describe how you want to be treated when you can no longer make your own health care decisions.

A recent poll from Harris Interactive commissioned by the American Bar Association shows that while more than three-quarters of Americans know they need to plan how they want to be cared for if they are incapacitated and unable to make health care decisions, fewer than one-third have actually appointed someone to act on their behalf.

Many people are afraid to verbalize their wishes, fearing that putting their decisions about health care in writing makes the need for them more real, or fearing they will give another person control over their person or possessions.

Giving up the right to make one's own decisions is just one of the prevailing myths about health care advance directives. The fact is that as long as a person is competent, he or she can revoke the directive or overrule a proxy's decision.

Another myth is that an advance directive always means "do not treat." The reality is that an advance directive expresses what a person wants and does not want. For one person, it may indicate continuing treatment against all



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odds. In another instance, it may indicate the person just wants to be made comfortable.

Advance directives can take the form of a health care power of attorney or a health care proxy that names an individual to make decisions on a person's behalf; a living will that outlines specific actions caregivers should take during treatment; and a combination of the two, such as a document that addresses a person's medical, personal, emotional and spiritual needs.

A consumer kit from the American Bar Association's Commission on Law & Aging contains 10 tools that look at how to select a health care proxy, what to do after signing the advance directive, a guide for health care proxies and additional resources.

To download a copy, visit <http://www.abanet.org/aging/toolkit/home.html>, or send your e-mail address to the American Bar Association, Commission on Law and Aging, 740 15th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20005-1019.