



National Healthcare Decisions Day A Day to Catalyze Conversation & Action

Benjamin Franklin once wrote “in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.” It makes perfect sense, then, that after we send in our taxes, we should turn our attention to preparing for life’s other certainty. For the past 7 years on April 16th people around the US have celebrated National Healthcare Decisions Day – a day created to “inspire, educate & empower the public & providers about the importance of advance care planning.”

Advance care planning is the 3-step process of **thinking about**, **discussing**, and **documenting** the type of medical care you want to receive – or *not* receive – when you are seriously ill or at the end of your life. Each step is important. Unfortunately, many people skip the discussion step and go straight to documentation, completing documents such as advance directives or living wills. (A recent New York Times article points out several issues with this approach.)

RTH UCRV has teamed with Dartmouth-Hitchcock’s (DH) Office of Community Health and Partners for Community Wellness (PCW) to encourage and support advance care planning in the region. Here’s what we’re doing:

First, we are **promoting conversations in our communities** around end-of-life care. Making sure your relatives and friends know what your wishes are is important so that they can speak up when you can’t speak for yourself. As the NY Times article points out: “In a crisis, doctors will turn to those people – more than to any document – to learn what the patient wants.” Community events, such as the one described in our March 2015 newsletter, can help catalyze these conversations with your loved ones. Second, we are **connecting people to resources** in the community, including specially trained individuals who can help guide you through advance care planning – wherever you are in the process. Finally, we are **working with the health care system** (see DH’s Honoring Care Decisions program) to make it easier for health care providers to know and follow their patients’ wishes. One issue is that there is currently no standardized location for storing advance directives, which means patients aren’t sure where to send them and providers aren’t sure where to find them. All too often, doctors can’t locate an advance care document during a medical crisis because it’s filed away somewhere at the patient’s house or a lawyer’s office.

So, what can you do? Here are 5 ways you can make progress on your advance care planning – whether you choose to do so on Thursday for National Healthcare Decisions Day or on another day in the near future:

1. **Start or continue the conversation.** On Thursday, April 16th, attend the free session, “Advance Care Planning: Let’s Talk About It!” from 10:00am-11:30am at the Aging Resource Center. Can’t make it? Have a conversation with your family or a friend over dinner, while out for a walk, or whenever you have the chance.
2. **Get more information.** Information Booths will be set up at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center outside the cafeteria on Level 2 and near the East Mall Cafe on Level 3 on April 16th. The booths will be set up all day, but if you want to talk to a person go there between 11:30am-1:30 pm.
3. **Hear from the experts.** On May 20th, Norwich Aging in Place is sponsoring a free public forum, “Before We Go – End of Life Planning For Elders and Their Families,” where a panel of experts in end of life care and planning will talk and answer questions. The event takes place from 7pm-9pm at the Norwich Congregational Church.
4. **Schedule a 1-on-1 conversation.** If you would like to talk with a trained facilitator about your Advance Care Planning, you can contact Maria Koehler with the Office of Care Management at Dartmouth-Hitchcock at maria.c.koehler@hitchcock.org or 603.650.5758.
5. **Revisit your Advance Directive.** If you already have an advance directive or living will, treat this day as an annual opportunity to pull it out, wherever it is – *is it in a logical place where people can find it quickly?* – and review it to make sure it still reflects your wishes. Just as importantly, take the time to share it with someone you care about and trust.

Remember that advance care planning is not a single event or day; it’s an ongoing process that you should come back to regularly. But our busy lives can make it easy to forget. That’s why we think having one day of the year when we turn our thoughts and conversations to end of life care and planning is something worth celebration *and* participation!