

Get your Healthcare Affairs in Order

by Dr. Calvin E. Warren, Jr. MD MSMM CPE

Dr. Calvin E. Warren, Jr. MD MSMM CPE is a board certified internist and a physician executive who has worked in the Cleveland area since 1986. He is currently the Medical Director for WellCare of Ohio, which serves the Medicaid community in Northeast Ohio.

We in the African American community know it is very difficult to talk about death and dying. It is even harder to talk about losing someone you love to sickness or illness. But we need to. One of the most important things you can do to help ease the burden on your loved ones is make your healthcare wishes known before they are ever needed.

Every one knows about the importance of having a will for protection of our financial assets and possible inheritances to leave to those we care about. Letting your family know your wishes concerning health care decisions is just as important.

Making good use of what's called "**Advanced Directives**" will give you a voice in decisions about your medical care when you are unconscious or too ill to communicate to your loved ones about your wishes. As long as you are competent and able to express your own decisions, your advance directives will not be used and you are free to accept or refuse any medical treatment. But if you become seriously ill you may lose the ability to participate in those decisions, and leave your family and loved ones to guess what you may have wanted to happen.

There are several parts to Advanced Directives and each state has its own guidelines as to how they are used. In Ohio, there are 4 basic documents:

A Living Will – This is the document where desires about life-sustaining treatment can be outlined if you become permanently unconscious or terminally ill. This requires the agreement of two licensed physicians to become effective.

Health Care Power of Attorney – If you wish to appoint someone to make medical decisions for you in the event you are unable, this document would be useful. This person may be a spouse, child, other relative or friend. They do not need to be an attorney of law. Authorization is given to make medical decisions in any situation where you are unable to communicate, not just unconscious or terminally ill.

Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) – By completing this form with your physician you can have the option of not being revived in the event of a cardiac or respiratory arrest. Many people have the fear of being permanently on a respirator or in a coma after a catastrophic

injury or illness. Having this in place would make sure that your specific desires are known.

Organ and Tissue Donation – Letting your family know that you would like to donate ahead of time relieves them of the burden of making that decision during a time of grief and loss.

When in place, these appropriately prepared documents can relieve the decision burdens placed on love ones while allowing those you care about to be comforted that your final wishes are being followed exactly how you want them to be.

Consider this to be a final act of love for those you care about.

For more information, check this website: http://www.ohpco.org/living_will.htm