



## Boston Health Notes

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& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

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### **National Healthcare Decisions Day: You Owe It to Yourself and Your Loved Ones**

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Did you know that April 16<sup>th</sup> is National Healthcare Decisions Day (NHDD)? NHDD is a nationwide initiative to encourage adults to express their wishes regarding healthcare and for families, providers, and the legal and faith communities to respect those wishes, whatever they may be.

#### **Why Plan Ahead?**

It is understandably difficult to speak with loved ones about what may happen in the event of an illness or injury. Unfortunately, accidents and illness happen. And, there may come a time when you are unable to speak for yourself. Do you know what healthcare treatments you **would** and **would not** want? What are your concerns? Who should speak for you?

Taking the time now to talk with your family, your healthcare provider, and others who need to know can ensure that your wishes are followed and give comfort and peace of mind to your loved ones.

Together, create an “advance directive” and choose someone to ensure your wishes are respected in the event you are unable to make your own healthcare decisions.

#### **Basic Facts**

- An “advance directive” is a set of written or verbal instructions for your care, including who can make decisions on your behalf. The advance directive is discussed and created before an illness or injury occurs and is used in the event you are unable to make decisions due to that illness or injury
- It’s relatively easy, but only 25 percent of all Americans have an advance directive
- Less than 50 percent of severely or terminally ill patients had an advance directive in their medical record
- Only 12 percent of patients with an advance directive had received input from their physician to create it

- Between 65 and 76 percent of physicians whose patients had an advance directive were not aware that it existed
- More than 40 percent of Americans have had a friend or relative suffer from a terminal illness or coma in the last five years and for a majority of these people, the issue of withholding life-sustaining treatment came up

## **What You Should Know**

- Anyone 18 or older should consider an advance directive – not just the elderly
- Your advance directive should reflect *your* wishes and your cultural and personal beliefs
- You don't need a lawyer – advance directives are free
- Advance directive laws are not the same in every state
- Many organizations offer advance directive documents that are easy-to-read, easy-to-understand, and are culturally and linguistically appropriate

## **What You Can Do**

- Talk with your loved ones
- Decide who should speak for you in the event you are unable to speak for yourself
- Complete your advance directive
- Encourage others to do the same

## **Information and Help**

Information and resources are available at [www.nationalhealthcaredecisionsday.org](http://www.nationalhealthcaredecisionsday.org):

- AARP: End-of-Life Planning  
[http://www.aarp.org/families/end\\_life/](http://www.aarp.org/families/end_life/)
- Aging With Dignity (Five Wishes)  
<http://www.agingwithdignity.org/> or call 850.681.2010
- American Hospital Association: Put It In Writing  
[http://www.putitinwriting.org/putitinwriting\\_app/index.jsp](http://www.putitinwriting.org/putitinwriting_app/index.jsp)
- Caring Connections  
<http://www.caringinfo.org/> or call 800.658.8898

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