Ensuring You Receive the Care You Want and Need

Health care documents provide important information about your health history. These documents identify the person designated to make decisions for you in the event you are too ill to do so, and what measures you’d like taken if you are unable to make decisions due to a medical, mental health or other issue. Everyone hopes these documents are never going to be needed however, it is important to empower people you trust to carry out your wishes should it be necessary. What follows is an outline of various documents you should consider putting in place.

Medical Records Summary. A document that provides an overview of your health history is invaluable in relaying information quickly to health care professionals. Be sure to include your name, date of birth, allergies, medications you are taking along with dosages, physicians’ names, health conditions and detailed emergency contact information. You may be able to add this information to your health care profile in a database offered by your physician’s medical practice. Alternatively, you can write it up and carry it with you in your wallet.

HIPPA Release of Information. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) protects patient privacy. HIPPA guidelines also allow you to designate how you would like to share information with family, friends and designated representatives and insurance companies. Health care providers and other entities such as hospitals, provide a notice of privacy practices form and ask patients to sign it, to ensure information is shared appropriately.

HIPPA and Parents of Young Adult Children. When older teen children reach 18, their parents no longer have the right to obtain medical information or make decisions about the adult child’s care. This applies even if the child is covered by the parents’ insurance.

Therefore, it is important for parents and their children to have an open conversation about whether or not they are comfortable signing a HIPPA Release of Information to allow parents to participate in a child’s care. Typically, the form is completed when the child turns 18 and does not require notarization. Both the parent(s) and the child should keep a copy.

Medical Power of Attorney. A medical Power of Attorney can also be called a Health Care Power of Attorney (HCPOA). This is a legal document that allows a person to name someone to make medical decisions on their behalf if they are too ill to decide for themselves, or if they unexpectedly become incapacitated. Having this document in place saves time and prevents confusion at what may be a crucial time. This document can be stored at your attorney’s office and can be added to your records at your physician’s medical practice. Alternatively, it can be maintained in a file at your home that you can quickly access in a medical emergency.

Durable Power of Attorney. The Durable Power of Attorney is a legal document in which someone designates another person to make legal, financial and health care decisions on their behalf in the event of a serious illness, an accident or mental incapacity. If this is not in place, and a person is unable to make decisions and manage their own affairs, a family must go to court to establish a designee. This document can be stored at your attorney’s office and or it can be maintained in a file at your home that you can quickly access in a medical emergency. You may want the person you have designated to have a copy in their files.
**Advance Directives.** Advance Directives are legal directives that state a person’s wishes for end-of-life care when they are unable to make their own decisions. Selections can be made to omit or include medical are, such as dialysis, a breathing machine, feeding tubes and/or organ donations. This document can be stored at your attorney’s office and can be added to your records at your physician’s medical practice. Alternatively, it can be maintained in a file at your home that you can quickly access in a medical emergency. You may want the person you have designated to act on your behalf to have a copy in their files.

**Talk to the people who are important to you**

It is important to start the conversation with your family and friends to make your health care wishes known to them before a health crisis arises. It is important to have documents in place that reduce doubt in your loved ones’ minds to guide them in participating in your care.

Health care records are critical to helping providers deliver high-quality treatment and a continuum of care consistent with your wishes. Talk with the people that will be called on to help in times of crisis and share your feelings and ensure that they understand what you want should a time come when you are unable to communicate your wishes. You can make an appointment to talk with your doctor about your wishes and then work with an attorney to get your documents in order. Make sure your documents are clear and that you have provided them to your physician. You can’t plan everything, but you can ease the burden for the people in your life that care most about you by letting them know what’s important to you.