



## TALKING ABOUT AND PLANNING FOR END-OF-LIFE MAKES SENSE

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You know it's coming someday, but you'd just rather not talk about it. Who wants to tempt fate by talking about end-of-life plans?

Yet if you don't have those conversations about what you want, someone else may have to make decisions when you are unable to speak for yourself. This may lead to having more care, or less care, or a different kind of care than fits with your desires and values. And the pressure of making decisions, unguided and unprepared, can add tremendous stress for your family members in an already challenging time.

Even when you know the importance of addressing end-of-life wishes, getting started is not so easy. Here are some suggestions.

First, start the conversation with yourself. Think about the concerns or fears you have about dying. Many people worry about being in pain, losing control or dignity, being alone, being overly-sedated, or becoming a burden to their family. Questions to ask include:

- What matters most to me? What gives my life the most meaning? What is my attitude towards death?
- What kind of medical treatment do I want? At what point would I prioritize comfort care over curative treatment?
- Who do I want to take care of me? Do I have family and friends who can help? How will caring for me impact them? How do I feel about being dependent on them? Will I need to arrange for paid caregivers?
- Who do I want to be with me at the end? Who do I trust to carry out my healthcare decisions if I'm unable to?
- Would I want hospice care? Hospice supports living fully and comfortably by providing medical, social, spiritual, and practical support to the terminally ill *and* their families.
- Where do I want to die? Would I rather be at home, in a hospital, or in a facility?
- Are there things I want to happen after I'm gone? What are my funeral wishes? What do I want to have happen to my assets?

When you have a clearer picture of what you do and don't want, making plans and outlining your wishes becomes much easier.

The next step is to gather information about available options that will help you achieve your end-of-life goals. Find out what different care options exist, what the costs are, what the trade-offs may be. There are many caregivers, care facilities and social support businesses and agencies available locally. Senior Services also offers a

wide variety of financial, medical and long term care services for clients and their families in Benton and Linn counties.

Of course, there is a world of information on the internet. At [www.bentonhospice.org](http://www.bentonhospice.org), you'll find more about care options and support, local and national resources, advance directives, as well as detailed information about the support and care hospice can provide at the end-of-life.

After you have thought through your own wishes, it's time to talk openly with your family and friends about what your hopes and fears are for the end stage of your life. Share the answers you came up with from the above questions. Maybe a particular event or news story would be a way to introduce the topic. "Did you see the story today about the woman on life support whose family can't agree what to do? I don't want that ever to be me. Could we talk about my wishes? I may need your help someday."

Documenting your wishes is a critical part of the process. An Advance Directive is a do-it-yourself tool designed to ensure that your end-of-life decisions and preferences are honored. An Advance Directive is a legal document that clearly expresses your wishes for care and treatment if you reach a point where you can no longer speak for yourself.

Every state recognizes Advance Directives, but they do vary from state to state. You can find a copy of Oregon's Advance Directive at [www.oregonhospice.org/online\\_store\\_books.htm](http://www.oregonhospice.org/online_store_books.htm). Other states' forms can be found at [www.caringinfo.org](http://www.caringinfo.org). You can also get a copy at most physicians' offices as well as at Benton Hospice Service's office.

Once your Advance Directive is completed, it is important that you share your plans with those close to you. This is another way to start the conversation about end-of-life plans and wishes. Also, be sure to give your designated healthcare representative and your physician a copy of your Advance Directive.

Yes, we all know dying isn't an option. But we do have choices about how we live right up to the end. Knowing your options, talking with those you care about, and making a plan for the end-of-life won't hasten or postpone death, but it can make the experience less stressful, more meaningful, and, most importantly, what *you* want it to be.

*For more information, contact Benton Hospice Service at 541-757-9616 or visit our website, [www.bentonhospice.org](http://www.bentonhospice.org).*