It is a good idea to speak with your loved one’s doctor about any potential future health risks. Including their physician also ensures that everyone is on the same page for long-term care decisions. It is worth noting that talking with the doctor about advance care planning during a wellness visit is covered by Medicare.

The most important things to take into consideration before making any specific decisions are your loved one’s personal values.

1. Is it important to them to be able to be mobile, so paralysis or coma may not be acceptable?
2. Do they need the ability to speak to their loved ones or do they feel they could communicate in other ways should speech be impaired?
3. Would they want pain medications at the end of life if it meant that they were drowsy and lethargic all the time?
4. If in a facility, is it important to them that their pets and grandchildren can visit or be with them?

Source: National Institute on Aging and The Conversation Project – Institute for Healthcare Improvement

Where to Draft Your Advance Directive

The laws governing how a state will honor your Advance Directive vary from state to state. Often, one state will not honor an Advance Directive created in another state. If your loved one travels or resides in several states, it is recommended that you create an Advance Directive in each location.

Source: Death with Dignity

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Some of the many things to think about for an Advance Directive:

- Are they open to the use of CPR?

- Are they willing to be put on a ventilator or other life sustaining mechanical apparatus? If so, for how long?

- What level of feeding/hydration is acceptable?

- Do they want to live their last days in a hospital, in hospice, or at home?

- What level of comfort care and pain medications are acceptable?

- What if they require blood transfusions or organ transplants?

- Have they filled out an organ donation card?

Many organizations offer online templates for Advance Care Directives that can be used as a starting point. Many hospitals will require the directives to be notarized.

Source: National Institute on Aging and The Conversation Project – Institute for Healthcare Improvement

What is a DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) Order?

A DNR order is a document that indicates to emergency and medical responders that the person does not want CPR or other life-restoring measures should their heart or breathing stop. In the moment, it may be hard to honor this wish. It is easier to have a clear directive and a healthcare proxy willing to make this decision on their behalf.

If your senior has indicated that they would like to donate their organs, they will need to note that the desire to donate supersedes the DNR since there may be a need to keep the heart beating until the organs can be taken for donation.

Source: National Institute on Aging