



What You Need to Know

What is a psychiatric advance directive?

An advance directive is a written document that expresses your wishes in advance about what types of treatments, services and

other assistance you want or don't want during a personal mental health crisis. It provides a clear statement of your medical treatment preferences and other wishes or instructions. You can also use it to grant legal decision-making authority to another person to be your advocate until the crisis is over.

What are the benefits of having an advance directive?

A psychiatric advance directive can:

- Promote your autonomy and empowerment;
- Enhance communications between you, your doctor, treatment team and family;
- Protect you from ineffective, unwanted or possibly harmful treatment or actions;
- Help prevent crisis situations and the use of involuntary treatment or safety interventions, such as restraint or seclusion.

When will I need an advance directive?

An advance directive goes into effect if you are hospitalized and it has been determined that you lack the capacity to make decisions for yourself. By writing your advance directive when your capacity is not in question, you have the opportunity to better influence what happens during a hospital stay. In an emergency situation, however, it is important to understand that doctors retain the authority to make decisions that are deemed necessary to ensure your safety and that of other patients and hospital staff.

What should a psychiatric advance directive include?

You can include the medications and dosages that you know are most helpful to you and those that you do not wish to receive; names of facilities or healthcare professionals you want involved in your care; people who can help you (such as paying your bills, or taking care of your children, pets or plants). You can even identify the people you do or do not want as visitors if you're hospitalized.

One of the more powerful features of an advance directive is your ability to designate someone else (an agent) to make decisions for you if you are admitted to a psychiatric hospital. You can name that person by stating that only he or she should make decisions for you in the event that you have been determined to lack the capacity to do so.

Inside, you'll find a worksheet you can use to start thinking about your own advance directive.

Who should be my agent?

The person you select should be someone you trust to advocate for you — a family member or friend. He or she will tell others what kind of treatment you do or do not want, and supervise your care. You may wish to choose more than one agent. You can make one the primary agent and designate another as a back up, or you could give each person different responsibilities. Perhaps you trust one person to make your healthcare decisions and another to take care of your household matters (bills, etc.). Be clear about who should do what.

Before naming an agent, discuss your plans with the person(s) you want to designate. Each of them must fully understand your request.

More questions and answers about advance directives are on the back side.

Psychiatric Advance Directive Worksheet

This worksheet will help you to start thinking about what you want in your psychiatric advance directive. It is not designed to be a legal document. Some states require that advance directives be done in a particular way for them to be considered legal documents. You should consult with an attorney or someone from your state's protection and advocacy (P&A) program. Visit www.napas.org, or call (202) 408-9514 for information specific to your state.

What types of treatments or services are helpful to you during a crisis? This can include medications (and dosages); names of facilities or healthcare professionals you want to be involved in your care; what helps you calm down if you're feeling overly agitated; who can help you in other ways (such as making household decisions); people you want as visitors if you're hospitalized; etc. Be as specific as possible. You may need to use additional sheets.

What types of treatments or services are NOT helpful to you during a crisis? This can include medications (and dosages) that you know will not be helpful; names of facilities or healthcare professionals you prefer not to go to; ways that people treat you that make you upset or angry; people you don't want to see if you are hospitalized, etc. Again, be as specific as possible:

Psychiatric Advance Directive Worksheet

Your Choice of Agent(s)

An agent is a person you authorize to make decisions for you when it is determined that you are unable to make decisions for yourself.

Agent's Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, and Zip: _____

Daytime Phone: (_____) _____ - _____

Evening Phone: (_____) _____ - _____

Mobile Phone: (_____) _____ - _____

E-mail Address: _____

If you want, you can choose one person as the primary agent and a second person as a backup in case the first person is unable or unwilling to serve as your agent.

Your Choice of Revocability

Some people want to have the option to revoke their advance directive even while they're in crisis. They may change their minds about their expressed wishes or become dissatisfied with the decisions their agent is making. Other people know that they don't make good decisions when they are in crisis and want their advance directive to be irrevocable. However, if you revoke your advance directive, it will be as though you never had one. Laws regarding revocability vary from state to state, so check before making a decision.

Even if I were in the middle of a psychiatric crisis, I [would | would not] (circle one) want to be able to revoke my advance directive.

Explanation of your choice of revocability, if you choose to give one:

Do I need a lawyer to prepare an advance directive?

State laws vary. To maximize the enforceability of your advance directive, you may wish to consult with an attorney or someone from your state's protection and advocacy (P&A) program to see what your state allows. To find the P&A system in your state, visit the National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems' Website at www.napas.org, or call (202) 408-9514.

Who should have a copy of my advance directive?

It's important that people know you have an advance directive and know where to find it. Put a copy in your home where it can be easily found; and, put another one in a safe place with your other important papers. Be sure to give copies to people you trust — your agent or a trusted friend or relative; you should also have one on file at any hospital where you have been a patient before.

Can I change my mind?

You can change the contents of your advance directive by making corrections or writing out a new one. However, it is your responsibility to ensure that everyone has a copy of your most current advance directive.

Depending on where you live, you can also choose to make your advance directive revocable. This means you can reserve the right to cancel your advance directive even during a crisis. This must be stated in writing. However, if you choose to revoke your advance directive, your agent will no longer be able to advocate for you. Before you decide whether to make your advance directive revocable, you should thoroughly discuss this with your friends, family and healthcare providers.

For more information, contact your local Mental Health Association (MHA) or the National Mental Health Association at 800-969-NMHA (6642) or www.nmha.org.



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