



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Health

P O BOX 2448
RICHMOND, VA 23218

KAREN REMLEY, MD, MBA, FAAP
STATE HEALTH COMMISSIONER

TTY 7-1-1 OR
1-800-828-1120

April 2, 2012

Dear Colleague,

An advance health care directive is a very important part of health care planning, and while 90 percent of Americans have heard of a living will, only 29 percent actually have one. The U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, in a 2003 article, "Advance Care Planning: Preferences for Care at the End of Life," found that less than 50 percent of severely or terminally ill patients studied had an advance directive in their medical record, only 12 percent of patients with an advance directive received input from their physician, and between 65 and 76 percent of physicians whose patients had an advance directive were not aware that it even existed.

When faced with making choices about medical treatments on behalf of another, family members will look to you for advice. As the trusted clinical advisor, each of us wants to assure that we are providing care according to the patient's wishes. Unfortunately, many patients are not aware of how to document or share their preferences and seldom start these conversations with their physicians. This is why I am sharing with you a tool that can assist in addressing this sensitive and essential part of health care, Virginia's new Advance Health Care Directive Registry. The registry is a free service that provides a simple way to store and share advance directives.

The Virginia Department of Health, in partnership with UNIVAL, Inc. and Microsoft Corp., developed a simple and easy to use service that uploads advance directives and other legal documents to a secure online registry, <https://www.virginiaregistry.org>. This registry is a place to store any documents that patients would like to make available in the event they are unable to express their wishes regarding medical care. This secure registry allows Virginia residents to store their Advance Health Care Directive, Health Care Power of Attorney, Declaration of Anatomical Gift, and other documents so that medical providers, emergency responders, family members, and anyone else they grant access will honor their wishes.

Every directive is intended to be honored across various settings, including hospitals, nursing homes, and by emergency medical services personnel. Virginia's database of advance directives is held on a secure site, protected by the most up-to-date web and database security standards. All information submitted is confidential and will be used only by authorized individuals. Only patients have the authority to make changes to their directives.

As we approach National Health Care Decisions Day on April 16, a day highlighting the importance of advance health care decision-making, I would like to present a challenge to you. I ask that you take part in the Medical Society of Virginia Foundation's "2012 Lead by Example" campaign and submit your own advance directive. Not only will you declare your wishes but you will also become familiar with the site. By participating in the challenge you can help the foundation reach its goal of adding 2,012 new advance directives between 3/16 and 4/16.

To help you with meeting the challenge, more information about advance directives is available:

- The Medical Society of Virginia, <http://www.msv.org/advancedirectives>, provides advance directives and end of life planning tools.
- The Virginia State Bar, <http://www.vsb.org/site/public/healthcare-decisions-day>, offers downloads large-print advance directives and version of the form for individuals with mental health conditions.
- National Health Care Decisions Day, <http://www.nhdd.org>, provides information on ways you can take part in National Health Care Decisions Day.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to approach this very sensitive subject with all patients. I hope that you will view this as an opportunity to lead by example and share the benefits of the registry with your patients. I trust you will find that the registry provides useful information for your patients but also for your own planning. If you have questions about the registry, please contact the Advance Healthcare Directive Registry Coordinator, Kim Barnes, at 804-864-7661.

Thank you,