

Remarks from Patricia A. Bomba M.D.

Vice President and Medical Director, Geriatrics
Excellus BlueCross BlueShield

We don't know how and we don't know when, but each and every one of us is going to die some day. The question is when our time comes - will our wishes about what type of care we want to receive be followed? Will anyone know what we want?

Dying is as much a part of life as birth - but unlike our birth, death is an uncomfortable subject to talk about. At the same time, it is also human nature to try to control our destiny as much as possible.

We're here today to talk about how we can give our families the gift of peace of mind while assuring ourselves that our final wishes have been made clear. Today we are encouraging as many people as possible to talk with their families about their wishes - and to fill out an advance care directive.

It is an important step in assuring that your wishes will be honored if you are unable to speak for yourself and unable to make your own decisions. We all face the possibility of a sudden, unexpected life-threatening illness or injury when we are unable to speak for ourselves but will recover. Decisions on how we wish to receive care in these circumstances should not be left to the end-of-life.

Planning for medical care in the event that you are facing death or sudden illness is called Advance Care Planning. It is a process that ultimately results in the completion of two documents, the Health Care Proxy and the Living Will. It begins with: learning about what is involved and why it is important, exploring your own personal values and beliefs, choosing your personal spokesperson, who is legally referred to as an agent in the Health Care Proxy.

It's not enough to simply fill out the form. You need to share this information with your spokesperson, your family, your doctor, and other trusted individuals such as clergy and your attorney. Completing and sharing both documents with family, all physicians involved in your care, your preferred hospital, and trusted individuals will assure that they are accessible when they are needed.

Finally, life changes over time and our personal circumstances, values, beliefs, and wishes may change. Therefore, it is important that these documents are reviewed and updated periodically.

Personally, I completed my Health Care Proxy and Living Will more than a decade ago. I have updated them three times since then and review them annually to be sure that it expresses my wishes. In doing so, I continue to hope for the best while preparing for the worst.

To assist ALL individuals in our community with understanding the Advance Care Planning process, an Advance Care Booklet has been compiled. As a co-leader in the Community-Wide End-of-Life/Palliative Care Initiative, Excellus has agreed to print and distribute this booklet for the community at large.

Thank you to all the participants in this press conference for taking time to promote awareness of Advance Care Planning. I also want to thank the members of the Community-Wide End-of-Life/Palliative Care Initiative for their support and the countless consumers who have reviewed the booklet and provided sound advice. As we embark on this campaign to increase awareness of Advance Care Planning in our community, our ultimate goal is to increase the completion rate of Health Care Proxies and Living Wills in the Greater Rochester Community.

Spiritual Leaders Sign their Personal Advance Care Directives at the News Conference



L-R: Rabbi Kotok, Bishop
Clark, Dr. Shafiq



L-R: Rev. Rivera, Pastor Stark,
Rev. Newton and Sr. Beth
LeValley