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Uniontown Hospital Media

Release

What would you do if you couldn't communicate your wishes?



Planning for the unthinkable is not a task most people want to engage in. But what would happen should tragedy or accident strike and you were left incapable of communicating your medical wishes? Does your family know what health care treatments you would and would not want if you could not speak? Have you even considered what those directives might be?

As part of our commitment to "Making a healthy difference in the lives we touch," Uniontown Hospital will participate again in a yearly campaign to try and help area residents consider their options, learn about things like advance directives and living wills and plan for the future on the sixth annual National Healthcare Decision Day.

Wednesday, April 16, 2014, will be a day for all area residents, regardless their age or current health status, to be reminded of the importance of making their health care wishes known to loved ones and their care providers.

From 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the main lobby at Uniontown Hospital, medical professionals will be on hand to provide the public with guidance, information and tools to talk about their wishes with family, friends and health care providers. Each participant will receive a free resource kit and samples of health care power of attorney and living wills in order to prepare their documents in accordance with Pennsylvania State Law.

"Uniontown Hospital is very excited to help support National Healthcare Decision Day," said Denise Satanek, clinical director of the Intensive Care Unit at Uniontown Hospital. "Patients and families in Intensive Care need extra support when making decisions about complex care. Our multidisciplinary health care team is equipped to provide the knowledge and expertise for guidance through difficult situations."

For Immediate Release
April 9, 2014

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The hospital is encouraging everyone to voice their wishes and take steps to ensure that their choices are known and protected through things like an advanced directive.

Advance directives are legal documents that inform health care providers who you desire to make medical decisions for you and what treatments you would want or not want, should you be unable to communicate your wishes in a medical emergency.

Advance directives do not go into effect until you are no longer able to communicate or to make decisions.

Uniontown Hospital Executive Director of Critical Care, Sandy Thorpe, said that simply putting on paper your medical wishes can save families from having to make difficult decisions without your help, should such an incidence arise.

“Making decisions ahead of time and putting one’s wishes in writing avoids the difficult situations when a person becomes seriously ill and the family is unclear of what their loved ones would have wanted,” Thorpe, who also works on the hospital’s Ethics Committee, said. “We strongly support National Healthcare Decisions Day and encourage our community to have thoughtful conversations about their health care decisions and consider completing an advance directive with the assistance of our staff.”

Advance directives come in two main forms:

- A *health care power of attorney* (or *proxy* or *agent* or *surrogate*) documents the person you select to be your voice for your health care decisions if you cannot speak for yourself.
- A *living will* documents what kinds of medical treatments you would or would not want at the end of life.

Director of Medical Records at the hospital, Karen Keniston, said that advance directives can be electronically scanned and added immediately to a patient’s medical record prior to admission.

“If a patient wants to be sure that the advance directive is part of their medical record, whether they have ever been a patient here before or not, they can bring it to the Medical Record Release of Information Office, located in the main lobby of the hospital behind the Information Desk. We will ask them to fill out a very short form so we know who they

are, and scan their document accordingly. Advance directives will be followed by all caregivers if the patient is admitted or seen in the Emergency Department.”

Also, patients may make arrangements to complete a short form and mail a copy of their advance directive for scanning purposes. For more information, contact the Medical Records Release of Information Office at 724-430-5713.

For more information about National Healthcare Decision Day, please visit www.nationalhealthcaredecisionsday.org.