

Medicare Advance Care Planning Q&A

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Medicare: Helping You Make Your Wishes Known

Starting this year, Medicare is making it easier for you and your doctor to have conversations about your medical wishes. This is good news. These conversations are important. They help you think about what's important to you and help you get the care that you want when it matters most.

Having these conversations about your health care wishes is part of *Advance Care Planning, or "ACP"* in medical jargon. ACP also includes creating legal documents about your wishes, called *advance directives or advance health care directives*.

1. How is Medicare making it easier to talk to my doctor about my wishes?

Advance Care Planning (ACP) conversations are important and can be sometimes lengthy. It was hard for doctors to fit this conversation into the time frame of your regular office visit, which you know can feel very rushed as it is. Medicare recognized this and decided to pay doctors separately to have these important discussions with their patients. By paying additionally for Advance Care Planning conversations, Medicare is giving doctors the time to have this discussion with you. Medicare pays physicians in half-hour increments for ACP.

2. Are discussions about my wishes voluntary?

ABSOLUTELY. You can bring up the subject, or your doctor can do so in the course of giving you appropriate care. You always have the prerogative to accept or decline to have this conversation.

3. What will a discussion about my wishes be like?

ACP discussions are for explaining and discussing your wishes and your advance directive documents. If you already have advance directives, you and your doctor will discuss the choices you've made. You can also ask your doctor questions and get clarification about medical terms or situations that might arise, and to make sure that the selections in your documents reflect your actual wishes.

4. Should my doctor have a copy of my advance directives?

YES. To have this discussion, your doctor is likely to (and should) ask you for a copy of your advance directives. If you are an estate planning client of Maine Center for Elder Law, you may already be enrolled in the DocuBank® advance directives registry to make it easy for your doctors and hospitals to get your advance directives right away, 24/7/265. Just give your DocuBank® Emergency Card to the doctor's office staff when you sign in. They will use it to immediately get your directives and put them in your chart. Your doctor may even have your directives already, because when we registered you, we also supplied your doctor's office with the information necessary to obtain your directives from DocuBank. (We did this with your permission.) If you are not enrolled in DocuBank, bring a copy of your advance directive with you on your next visit and have the doctor put it in your chart, even if you are not going to have an ACP discussion at

your next visit. If you don't have an extra copy, bring the original and ask the office to make a copy for you, and an extra one or two to take home with you!

5. Does talking about ACP mean I eventually want to “pull the plug?”

NO! Not at all. Advance Care Planning is about figuring out and communicating **your wishes** — **WHATEVER THEY MAY BE**. This could be a discussion about wanting everything done to extend life as long as possible in all medical situations. Or it could be about wanting to be kept comfortable above all else in the case of a terminal illness. Or it could be a myriad of scenarios/choices in between, depending on the circumstances.

6. It is appropriate for my doctor to talk about my wishes when I'm healthy?

YES! Advance Care Planning is not just for sick people. Your doctor may have an ACP discussion with you at your Medicare “Annual Wellness Visit.” ACP discussions are recognized by the medical profession as a component of high quality care at many points in your life and health. In fact, hospitals have been required for 25 years to ask patients if they have an advance directive.

7. What else is included in an ACP discussion? Is ACP also about sharing whom I want to make decisions for me if I can't? YES. This is at least as important as talking about your wishes. You can also talk about organ donation and other related matters.

8. Is there a co-pay for ACP conversations with my doctor?

There is no co-pay when these discussions occur during your Medicare Annual Wellness Visit. There may be a co-pay at other times, depending on your Medicare plan.

9. Must I always talk with my doctor for Medicare to pay for an ACP discussion?

No, not necessarily. You may also be able to talk with a nurse practitioner, physician assistant, or other staff person who is supervised by your doctor — if your doctor's office permits this. Sometimes patients prefer to talk with these other health professionals, feeling that they are more compassionate or not as rushed.

10. This is an uncomfortable conversation for me. Are there real benefits to forcing myself to do this?

YES! Research shows that patients and their loved ones benefit from having advance care planning discussions. Studies have found that talking about choices for care — regardless of the specific care choices you make — increases patient and family satisfaction with their care. It also has been shown to reduce the emotional burden and distress on caregivers. The evidence bears out that talking about your wishes is a tremendous gift that you can give to yourself and to your loved ones.

11. Where can I find my advance directives?

If you signed an advance health care directive as part of your estate planning, you will most likely have either the original or a copy in your estate planning folder. If you can't find them there (or even if you can), and you are enrolled in DocuBank, they are easily accessible from DocuBank. Take your DocuBank card out of your wallet and go online to www.getdirectives.com. All you need is the member number and PIN on your card. You can print your advance directives or just view them online. Or, if you have a fax machine, you can use your card to call 800-362-8226 (DOCUBANK) to receive a fax.