



TIPS

from the Consumer Health Action Network

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Are you a caregiver?

Helping a loved one with a serious illness

Most people who provide care for a friend or family member don't think of themselves as a caregiver. Caregivers provide support to someone who needs help. It doesn't matter how many hours per week are spent providing support. Caregivers may live with the person they are caring for, providing assistance with daily needs, or may visit the person or call regularly.

Being a caregiver involves an investment in time and energy. Be sure to take care of yourself so that you stay healthy. Caregivers need breaks, exercise, and socializing. Support groups exist for almost every situation and are an excellent way to share information, find help, and deal with difficult situations with people who understand. Your loved one's health care provider or institution may know of a support group you could join.

Helping a loved one who is hospitalized with a serious illness:

Before or soon after a loved one is hospitalized with a very serious illness, it is important to talk about end-of-life care in case you are asked to help make decisions if your loved one goes into the hospital or is seriously ill. Talking about end-of-life care ahead of time will ease some of the stress. Several legal documents, called advanced directives, can be prepared ahead of time if a loved one cannot make decisions on their own to ensure that their wishes are understood and respected.

- A **living will** describes what type of medical care your loved one will want in certain situations. It only comes into effect when the person is diagnosed with a terminal illness and has less than six months to live, or is in a persistent vegetative state.
- A **healthcare power of attorney** is a person appointed to make decisions about the medical care of someone who is unconscious or can no longer speak for themselves.
- A **do-not-resuscitate order (DNR)** is a signed order that states no efforts are to be taken to restart the heart after it has stopped. If the decision is made that resuscitation is not what your loved one wants, then a DNR order must be written by the physician.

Advance directives are simple documents to complete and samples can be obtained through your local hospital, your attorney, or the Connecticut attorney general's office. Signed copies should be given to the family physician and be placed in the hospital chart each time your loved one is hospitalized. You should review the documents periodically to make sure they still reflect what your loved one wants.

Call the Consumer Health Action Network at 203-772-2817 or toll-free in CT at 888-873-4585 for more information.