

## **Advance Care Planning Becoming Part of Daily Health Care Dialogue**

### *Discussions About Advance Directives Are Important For Adults of All Ages*

**Portland, Ore.** – September 23, 2009 – When Dr. Angela Kalisiak was preparing to help her parents navigate through the process of updating their advance directive form as a result of their move from Oklahoma to Nevada, she discovered that her father's wishes went well beyond the standard desires about life support and organ donation. She learned that if there came a time when he was unable to communicate his desired treatment, he had very specific wishes to be surrounded by his favorite music, where those CDs were located, and that he wanted to be outside in the fresh air as much as possible. Experienced in the use of advance directives, and the value they bring to families both young and old, Dr. Kalisiak thought about what some of her own, more specific wishes might be.

The practice of advance care planning and the use of advance directives forms are more frequently used tools for health care professionals than ever before. Advance care planning helps to ensure that adults of all ages have a legal tool that protects their rights to receive medical treatment they do want or to refuse treatment they do not want, in the event they lose the ability to make or communicate decisions themselves. An advance directives document is used to prepare adults for the eventualities of life, and are meant to be coordinated with an individual's physician and updated on a regular basis.

Dr. Kalisiak leads up a program at Northwest Cancer Specialists, one part of which assists both patients and staff by providing information and support to complete their advance care planning. The program, entitled Coordinated Advocacy Resources Education Support, assists patients by outlining how they might get the most from their visits with physicians, helping determine values and preferences, and planning for life's end. The program is supported by the CareOregon Care Support and System Innovation Program.

"We have developed a program that enables us to work with staff, patients and the public to elevate awareness of the invaluable role of advance care planning for people of all ages, and help improve the way we discuss its importance. Everyone from our 24-year-old front desk administrator to the delivery vendor has seen the value in completing an advance directive," said Kalisiak. "This type of preparation gives each of us the ability to demonstrate both responsibility and kindness for those we love by making our wishes known."

Marge Lunan, an 88-year-old cancer survivor, learned first-hand the value of advanced directives when her husband and high school sweetheart died.

"As both a cancer survivor, and someone who lost their high school sweetheart, the value of an advance directive has touched my life in many ways," said Marge Lunan. "When my husband passed away, we were able to refer to his advance directive form and took great comfort

knowing what he wanted at the end of his life. And, as a parent of adult children, I want them to know my own wishes for treatment, as well as thinking about this for themselves and their own families.”

According to Oregon State Treasurer Ben Westlund, having an advance directive is part of being a responsible adult.

“Just as will preparation and proper financial planning give you peace of mind, so does creation of an advance directive. Once done, you know that your final wishes will be completely carried out at the time of your passing,” said Westlund. “Regardless of your age or health status, it’s about looking ahead to create stability for yourself and your family.”

The use of advance directives may not be new to Oregon, which traditionally leads the way in health care services and policy, but the discussion and engagement of younger adults and young families is one that is just beginning to gain momentum.

“As communities throughout our state partner with healthcare providers and our state’s leadership to address ways to make Oregon families healthier, the creation of an advance care plan is something that simply complements all other efforts,” said Glen Rodriguez, MD, President of Oregon Academy of Family Physicians. “Discussing creation of an advance directive is not about filling out forms or checking boxes, rather it’s a great opportunity for families to talk about their options, values and experiences.”

Health care providers at every stage of the continuum are taking part in the conversation related to advance care planning, and nurses are often at the forefront of those discussions. Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners are intimately familiar with the benefits of advanced planning in their own families and the families of their patients, and with the difficult challenges faced by families when an advanced directive is not available.

As Lynda Enos, RN, discovered when her mother was diagnosed with a rare brain tumor at the age of 59, planning was relevant even then, given the uncertainties of her illness. Fortunately, that prognosis did not come to pass, but, Enos says, “Our entire family discusses advance directives every year.”

Advance directive forms can be accessed at [www.caringinfo.org](http://www.caringinfo.org) or at most primary care physician’s offices. Advance directives may vary significantly from state to state, so it is recommended that adults moving to a new state consult with their physician to establish or update their advance care plan. Documents used to establish an advance care plan can include multiple tools, including a living will and medical power of attorney, or durable power of attorney for health care.

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*Media Note:* For more about advance care planning, the value of advance directives, or to speak to medical professionals or patients who have benefited from advance directives, please contact Lindsay Yale at Grady Britton, at 503-810-5902, or [lindsayb@gradybritton.com](mailto:lindsayb@gradybritton.com).