

“I wish we knew. We never talked about it.”

By Amy Hamane

The patient is in a coma and the doctor at the hospital is asking, “What kind of care would your Dad have wanted if he could speak?” Too often the answer is, “I wish we knew. We never talked about it.”

Medical technology extending our lives means that death is no longer what we once thought of as “natural”. Many people are dying in ways they would not choose, and many survivors are left feeling guilty and uncertain whether they made the right decisions for their loved ones.

But it doesn’t need to be this way. Community First wants to change this scenario. Community First wants every adult regardless of health status, to prepare an Advance Health Care Directive (AHCD) and to share it with loved ones and the doctor.

The AHCD allows you to choose someone that your doctor will be able to consult regarding medical treatment that you would—or would not—want if you are unable to speak for yourself. This person is called your Health Care Power of Attorney or Agent. The person you select as your Agent should be someone that you trust to carry out your healthcare wishes. Your Agent does not have to live near you but must be easily reached by phone or email.

Choices regarding end-of-life care are for each individual to decide. According to Charlene Iboshi who chairs the Advance Health Care Directive Committee, “At our workshops we go step-by-step through the AHCD document, providing an understanding of your choices. We encourage participants to document their choices now before a crisis occurs. When completed, it will be a legal document. Having conversations about your choices with your loved ones is an important gift to your family. Your loved ones won’t have to guess what kind of healthcare you want or do not want if you are no longer able to speak for yourself.

“For individuals who already have a Living Will, a Health Care Power of Attorney, or an Advance Health Care Directive, our presentation can help folks review their document to be sure it meets their needs today” according to Iboshi.

Community First workshops are free of charge. Other important things to know about the Advance Health Care Directive are that it can be changed at any time. Simply fill out a new one, have it witnessed or notarized, and it will be a legal document. It takes effect when you are near the end of your life; when you are no longer able to communicate. Your doctor and the hospital want you to have an Advance Directive that documents your wishes. If your family has to guess, they may disagree and argue. That makes it hard for the doctor to honor your wishes.

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Community First has workshops scheduled in June, August, October, and November. There are three ways that folks can participate: 1) In person workshops will be held in Hilo, Waikoloa, Kailua-Kona, Waimea, and Kealahou. 2) Or individuals can participate using the Zoom app if they have an iPad, computer, or smart phone. 3) Or those unable to participate on the scheduled dates can request a recording of a previous workshop to view on their computer or iPad at their convenience.

To register for any of the future workshops, go to <https://www.communityfirsthawaii.org> or call Amy Hamane at 808-443-4033 or Rosemary Burnett at 808-987-4405.

Community First is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit founded by the late Barry Taniguchi in 2014 to serve as a neutral forum for the community to come together, and as a catalyst for solutions to improve health and access to health care.