

ThedaCare: Supports National Healthcare Decisions Day

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NEENAH, Wis. – April is nationally recognized as National Healthcare Decisions month, and provides an opportunity to educate community members and health care teams about the importance of advance care planning. In addition to the month of recognition, National Healthcare Decisions Day (NHDD) is Saturday, April 16, and can be used as a conversation-starter with family members, and help understand the benefits of completing a Power of Attorney for Health Care (POA-HC). NHDD is an initiative to encourage patients to express their wishes regarding health care and for providers and facilities to respect those wishes, whatever they may be.

“For anyone over the age of 18, it’s never too early to have a POA-HC,” said Jenny Sanderfoot, MSW, Advance Care Planning Specialist for ThedaCare. “It’s important to complete this document, because accidents or illnesses can happen unexpectedly, no matter how young or old we are.”

A POA-HC is a legal document that allows you to name someone you trust to make health care decisions for you, essentially a health care agent, should you ever be unable to speak for yourself. The document does not need to be prepared by a lawyer.

“Many end-of-life situations are stressful for families,” Sanderfoot said. “With a plan in place and discussions held ahead of time, your health care agent can focus on

making decisions according to your wishes.”

Everyone over the age of 18 should have a POA-HC, with a copy on file with their health care system. When children reach the age of 18, their parents can no longer automatically make health care decisions for them. ThedaCare recommends that as soon as a person turns 18, they complete their document.

Additionally, Wisconsin is not a “next of kin” state, meaning that a spouse or immediate family member cannot automatically make certain health care decisions for a family member who is unable to speak for themselves, Sanderfoot said. She also noted that while talking with your loved ones about your health care goals is important, documenting them with a POA-HC is key.

“Our team wants to support normalizing advance care planning,” she said. “The advance directive will help empower you and your family, and guide our care teams to help fulfill your goals, values and wishes.”

Making Their Wishes Known

Marti and Chuck Coan, who have lived in Neenah for more than 60 years, recently completed a POA-HC.

“Making an appointment with the Advance Care Planning team helped us through the process,” explained Marti Coan. “It was important to complete the plan for our peace of mind. This plan should help guide our daughter and family if choices are difficult.”

The Coans said they worked with ThedaCare's Advance Care Planning team during one of the weekly clinics hosted to help community members.

"They made the process easy to understand and pleasant," said Marti Coan. "Our daughter was relieved and welcomed the open-door conversation."

According to Sanderfoot, there are two components to Advance Care Planning:

1. The POA-HC document itself, which is what health care systems need to acknowledge a legal decision maker.
2. The ongoing discussions that should be held between the person and those whom they name as their health care agents.

ThedaCare provides free assistance to anyone wishing to complete a POA-HC as part of its participation in the [Fox Valley Advance Care Planning Partnership](#), a community-wide initiative working to normalize Advance Care Planning conversations for people of all ages. That group also includes Ascension Wisconsin, Mosaic Family Health and representatives from the greater Fox Valley community.

ThedaCare has free weekly Advance Care Planning clinics available for patients Wednesday mornings by appointment. There are also free monthly group classes on the third Thursday of every month at Encircle Health; these are open to the public. Beginning in May 2022, ThedaCare will expand their ACP resources to six major rural areas: New London, Waupaca, Wild Rose, Berlin, Shawano and Oshkosh.

Sanderfoot is also available to assist families. Community members can call 920.358.1219 or email jennifer.sanderfoot@thedacare.org. For additional information about Advance Care Planning and to download the POA-HC document

please visit: thedacare.org/patients-and-visitors/advance-care-planning/.