

Voice your Choice advocates for patients' final wishes

The Voice your Choice initiative focuses on helping individuals plan for the end of life. We understand talking about end-of-life issues can be difficult for anyone. The more families become comfortable talking about death and dying, however, the more prepared they will feel when navigating those final days.

It's important to start the conversation before timing becomes critical. Having those discussions outside the context of imminent death helps everyone understand the options and allows them to clearly communicate wishes. When everyone is able to communicate effectively, those personal wishes for the end-of-life will be known and respected. Voicing your choice with loved ones will also help to ensure your wishes are followed.

How do families start this difficult conversation?

Sometimes getting started can be the hardest part. Some may find it easiest to speak with the entire family at one time, when the entire family is gathered together. Here are some questions that may help start the discussion.

- Why do you think that facing death is a difficult experience?
- Have you had this conversation with anyone before? Have you wanted to?
- Do you understand advanced directives?
- Do you want to be an organ and tissue donor?
- If you could have a choice, where would you prefer to die – at home, in a care facility, in a hospital?
- Are there special rites or ceremonies performed at death within your faith?
- What kind of funeral arrangements would you make for yourself if you knew you were dying?
- Would you want to be buried or cremated?
- Would you want a church funeral or a simple memorial service?
- Who should know about your wishes?



End-of-life planning involves more than medical decisions

Beyond making sure your family or those closest to you know your preferred medical decisions, make sure you give equal thought and let them know about your personal preferences. Sometimes the best starting point for end of life contemplations is to document your worries and concerns. Write it all down, then share it with those most important to you.

What do you want your loved ones to know?

(For example, are you worried about being kept alive by machines? Are there certain treatments that you do or do not want?)

What's important for you to do before you die?

(Do you want to mend a relationship? Do you have a bucket list of things you want to experience?)

How do you want your care to be managed if you become incapacitated?

Who do you want to make those decisions on your behalf?

(This is when an advanced directive or living will become important.)

How much do you want to know about your health?

(Different health conditions, and those with more than one health condition, can well have several 'decision' or crisis points along their journey.)

How do you want to be remembered?

Congratulations for starting your personal decisions journey. If you can begin to talk about the end of life while people are still healthy, you will have made a significant contribution to your family, and you will discover important information for yourself. Understanding family includes understanding hopes and fears around illness and dying. Conversations before the crisis help a family cope with inevitable loss. Preparing for death helps those who live on most of all.

Talk is the single most important thing that family and friends can do to prepare for the end of life of someone they love. Always difficult, the end of life can be amazingly rich. Learning, insight and love are possible to the last breath, and beyond.

Voice your Choice advocates for the healthcare wishes of CareBridge Services and Hospice of Southwest Ohio patients. For questions or to learn more, contact CareBridge Services at (513) 528-8150.