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TIME TO MAKE PLANS FOR FUTURE HEALTH CARE
National Advance Care Planning Week April 16-22

The AMA welcomes National Advance Care Planning Week, and encourages everyone to consider advance care planning and end of life decisions, regardless of their health or age.

Advance care planning ensures that, should a person lose capacity to make their own health care decisions in the future, health care decisions made on their behalf will be guided by their values, preferences, and goals of care.

AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, said today that advance care planning needs to be taken much more seriously in the community.

“People should understand that this is a fundamental issue of self-determination when they can no longer speak, or if they lose their competence to make decisions about their care in any other way. It is a gift that they can give to their family and friends in lifting the heavy burden of difficult decision making at the end of life,” Dr Gannon said.

“Advance care planning allows a person to take an active role in their health care even after they lose decision-making capacity, ensuring they receive the care they would actually want, and avoid treatments or interventions they would not want.”

Advance care planning involves a process of discussion and communication with their family, friends, and health care team, with the results documented on an advance care plan. The plan should be regularly revisited to ensure it continues to reflect the person’s preferences and goals of care, which may change as they get older or as a serious health condition progresses.

While everyone should consider advance care planning, it is particularly relevant to those with a chronic illness, a life-limiting illness, over 75 years of age, or at risk of losing capacity to make health care decisions.

“Advance care planning discussions and clearly delineating ‘goals of care’ should become a key part of routine health care conversations across Australia,” Dr Gannon said.

“GPs, in particular, can assist with the planning process by discussing an individual's current and possible future health situations, helping the individual to clearly articulate their preferences, and regularly reviewing the advance care plan with the individual.

“Advance care planning benefits the patient, their family members, and carers, as well as health care professionals.

“It not only means that people receive the care consistent with their values, beliefs, and goals of care, but it alleviates the stress and anxiety of family members who face making decisions on a person's behalf, but who may otherwise be unaware of the person's wishes.

“It also reduces the chance that a person will receive treatments or interventions that they do not actually want.”

AMA Federal Councillor and Chair of the AMA’s Ethics and Medico-Legal Committee, Dr Chris Moy, is an Ambassador for National Advance Care Planning Week 2018.

Background

- National Advance Care Planning Week is an initiative of Advance Care Planning Australia, a national program supported by funding from the Australian Government Department of Health, to raise awareness of advance care planning across Australia.
 - Advance Care Planning Australia delivers an extensive range of programs, services, training, and education to foster innovation, practice change, and research.
 - The Advance Care Planning Australia website is an excellent resource for individuals, families, friends, and carers. It guides people through the process of advance care planning and provides a range of resources, including information on forms and requirements for advance care planning in each State or Territory.
 - The website also provides important resources for health care professionals, including education and online learning.
 - The website is at <https://www.advancecareplanning.org.au>
 - The AMA's *Position Statement on End of Life Care and Advance Care Planning 2014* is at <https://ama.com.au/position-statement/end-life-care-and-advance-care-planning-2014>
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18 April 2018

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