

# SA Palliative Care Community Pharmacy Update

A joint initiative of South Australian Palliative Care Services

Advanced care planning is key to good palliative care. Pharmacists can witness the signing of documents legally acknowledging a person's medical wishes in the event they are unable to speak.

## Advanced Care Planning

In developed countries, leading causes of death involve complications to chronic illnesses. Throughout the course of a chronic illness people gain insight into their disease and how they wish to be managed. Yet during the terminal phase of a chronic illness more than half are unable to participate in the decision making process. Under these circumstances, clinicians refer to family or their own intuition. Goals of care may range from "avoiding suffering" to aggressive management in pursuit of "doing all that is possible". In documenting a person's wishes in advance, the goals of care are more certain. This can be achieved through a number of avenues:

- > Appointing an **Enduring Guardian** or a **Medical Agent**; or
- > Creating an **Advanced Care Plan** (also known as an anticipatory direction).

An **Enduring Guardian** or a **Medical Agent** is someone that the person trusts to speak on their behalf. They need to be greater than 18 years, competent to make their own decisions and not involved in any professional capacity in the delivery of the person's medical care. This needs to be documented and may also include specific conditions on the range of decisions the **Enduring Guardian** or **Medical Agent** can make. If both are appointed then the decisions of the **Medical Agent** prevail.

An **Advanced Care Plan** is a document that sets out the person's wishes for management of their condition using their own words. This is only activated once the

person is in the terminal phase of an illness or in a persistent vegetative state. The **Medical Agent** and **Enduring Guardian** must comply with any directions within the **Advance Care Plan**.

These documents must be signed in the presence an authorised witness (which includes a registered pharmacist). For these processes to work efficiently, these signed documents should be kept in a secure yet accessible place for when they are required. Copies should also be made for the doctor, hospital and family to have on file.

The SA Parliament has recently passed The Advance Care Directives Act 2013. When implemented in 2014, this will result in one document replacing these three forms. There will be provisions to recognise any document made under current law.

## Useful resources

- > Office of the Public Advocate:  
[www.opa.sa.gov.au/planning\\_ahead](http://www.opa.sa.gov.au/planning_ahead)
- > Advance Care Planning, Australia:  
[advancecareplanning.org.au/resources/south-australia](http://advancecareplanning.org.au/resources/south-australia)

## For more information

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