



Self-Determination in Mental Health: The Benefits of a Psychiatric Advance Directive

Advance directives play a significant part to ensure that needed and acceptable treatment and care are provided in a timely manner. The Declaration for Mental Health Treatment (Declaration) is an Advance Directive. The Declaration is often overlooked and rarely discussed unless the patient is in a state of repeat or continual crisis. This is a mistake. Depriving a person of the opportunity to have the knowledge about and choice of such a tool interferes with the ability to exert control over their life and illness. It is time to shake off the stigma concerning a mental health advance directive.

The benefits of a Mental Health Declaration or Advance Directive provide patients with an opportunity to state the type of treatment they prefer. Whether the treatment is psychotropic medications; ECT, hospitalization or any combination of treatments, a clear written statement of the patient's preferences is made through the Declaration. Once signed, dated and properly witnessed by two witnesses, the Declaration is enforceable in Illinois for three years and will continue in effect until the patient is no longer incapable of making treatment decisions as determined by a physician. The benefits of the Declaration are;

- Ability to make needs/illness known to healthcare providers
- Ability to appoint an attorney-in-fact to act as directed by the Declaration
- Treatment is rendered without multiple provider assessments
- Care is implemented in a timely manner
- Less time spent in the Emergency Room
- Less anxiety for patient and family members
- Increase ability to keep illness under control
- Decrease in critical events that may prolong recovery/stabilization
- Ability to select the agent

Take time to become familiar with the Declaration for Mental Health. There are many patients who will benefit from this tool. Like all Advance Directives, the Declaration is revocable in whole document or in part. In Illinois revocation is effective when it is communicated to the attending physician in writing and signed by the patient.