

National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization

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What are Living Wills? NHPCO offers free advance care planning resources

(Alexandria, Va) – Over the past weeks, Keith Olbermann has shared his personal experience regarding his father's health crisis on his MSNBC program "Countdown." On [yesterday's broadcast](#) (03/11/10) Olbermann spoke about the necessity of loved ones talking about the care they would want and completing a living will and appointing a health care proxy.

"Talking with families about health care wishes and completing living wills while you are healthy is about living fully," said J. Donald Schumacher, president and CEO of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. "Planning ahead and understanding the choices you and your loved ones might have to decide during a medical crisis has nothing to do with the infamous 'death panels' that have caused such confusion and distraction about an issue important to every single one of us."

NHPCO's Caring Connections initiative offers a range of materials and information free of charge—including state specific advance directive forms—at caringinfo.org/planningahead.

Planning ahead is about preparing for the future today. Communicating your end-of-life wishes to your loved ones, appointing a health care power of attorney, and addressing financial issues such as wills and paying for long-term care are just a few of the issues you can address today to plan ahead.

What are Advance Directives?

An advance directive—often called a living will—allows you to document your wishes concerning medical treatments and care when facing a medical crisis or at the end of life.

A medical power of attorney—also known as a health care proxy—is part of advance care planning. This allows you to appoint a person you trust as your health care agent (or surrogate decision maker), who is authorized to make medical decisions on your behalf. Before a medical power of attorney goes into effect a person's physician must conclude that they are unable to make their own medical decisions.

Advance directives are legally valid throughout the United States. It is important to complete and sign advance directives that comply with your state's law. However, you do not need a lawyer to complete and execute a living will or health care power of attorney. Each Caring Connections, state-specific advance care planning packet comes with complete step-by-step instructions. The documents are free of charge.

Visit caringinfo.org to learn more about planning for the unthinkable before a crisis. Information is also available from the HelpLine at 1-800-658-8898. Providers are encouraged to share these resources with their community.

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Caring Connections offers resources to help providers reach out and educate communities about advance care planning. Here are some of the resources that can be found on the Caring Connections website:

· [How to Talk with Your Loved Ones](#)

- [What to do if Family Members Disagree](#)
- [How to Talk with Your Healthcare Providers](#)
- [Talking with Others about Their End-of-Life Wishes](#)
- [Are You Traveling Without a Map? A Layperson's Guide to Advance Care Planning](#)
- [Advance Care Planning Awareness Ribbon](#)