

Dear UUCL Friends,

As your affiliated community minister, I come to you with 25 years of experience as a geriatric care manager. My community ministry, for the most part, is dedicated to eldercare. I offer all of you, old and not-so-old, this guidance as we adjust to and prepare for enduring and living through the Covid-19 pandemic. It's time we talk about what happens if we become critically ill. All of us need to have our legal and medical affairs in order, regardless of Covid-19. Nevertheless, now is a critical time we make plans so others can help us in time of crisis and emergency. I offer you this guidance and encourage you to follow through in implementation. Your willingness to plan and share information is nothing short of a gift to the folks who love you and will need to care for you. Believe me, the absence of a plan and shared information may result in delayed care and heartache.

Locate essential legal documents.

This is a very basic summary of necessary documents which are essential to direct your care. You need both a Durable Power of Attorney and Advanced Directives. The difference between a Power of Attorney (for Health Care) and Advanced Directives is a matter of the degree and chronicity of illness. Remember, it's possible to be sick for a long time without being considered terminally ill. In such a case, the Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care will assume responsibility for long term day to day decisions. The Advanced Directives would be used only when a life-threatening illness occurs, or when you are ill enough to require hospice care.

Durable Power of Attorney: A Durable Power of Attorney assigns authority to another person to act on your behalf and to carry out specific duties. Most often, the Durable Power of Attorney acts on your behalf when you are not able to make decisions for yourself, such as in the case of serious illness or cognitive impairments. A Durable Power of Attorney typically addresses health care and financial issues. Durable Powers of Attorney may name different people to assume different functions. While both medical and financial issues are important, in this case a Power of Attorney for Health Care is essential.

Last Will and Testament: There is no need to share this document with medical institutions or family, because it addresses what will happen with your property and assets after your death.

Advance Directives: This document address only life-threatening and end-of-life health care issues. This document addresses issues typically associated with extraordinary treatment, such as being placed on a ventilator or having intravenous or tube feedings for nutritional support. There are different models of Advanced Directives. One model is a standardized form and checklist. Another, which I prefer, is called Five Wishes. Five Wishes is a legally binding document in Kentucky. Sometimes Advanced Directives are called "Living Wills." I prefer not to use the term "Living Will," because it is frequently mistaken for a Last Will and Testament.

Review and use your legal documents.

Read your documents! It is not uncommon for documents to have designees who have died or who are not able to act. Be sure they say what you want them to say, especially the names of the designated POA or health care surrogates. Call your attorney for advice about how to be expedient in updating them. Make the Durable Power of Attorney and Advanced Directives readily available in an emergency. Do not store these documents in a safety deposit box where they cannot be easily accessed. Be sure that the people you designate as your POA have a copy of the documents. The designated POAs should scan these documents into their phones, or carry a copy in the glovebox of their cars, so they are immediately available when Going to a hospital in an emergency. Note: The exception is your last will and testament.

Create a Smart911 profile.

See smart911.com, a free service for people in the LFUCG boundaries. This information will show up on the EMS dispatchers' screen, so they will know what to expect when they arrive at your home. Use a designated phone number which will most likely be used to call 911.

Organize essential information.

During this crisis, your family will not be allowed to go into the hospital with you. Be sure you have essential information to give to the EMS and hospital staff. Assemble a "Go-Pack" of this essential information. Put it in an envelope marked "EMERGENCY INFORMATION" and place it in an easily accessible place, such as on your refrigerator door, or next to the door where emergency responders may enter.

Share emergency contact information.

For example, my neighbors have a key to my house and know how to contact my family. And, my family has contact information for my neighbors so they can check on me if they don't hear from me.

We will get through this together. We will be even better equipped to get through this together, if we plan and share essential information. Remember, it's a gift!

The Reverend Esther Hurlburt

ACTION. LOVE. JUSTICE.