



Psychiatric Advanced Directives

As with all types of “Living Wills”, Psychiatric Advanced Directives help individuals with mental illness control their future treatment if they become incapable of directing their own care. These legal documents also enable family members to assist their loved one in a crisis. Psychiatric Advanced Directives specify one’s preferences for medications, in-patient care and who should be notified in case of an emergency; as well as any important information that will assist recovery. Mental health consumers; their families and support systems; and health care providers all benefit from these directives.

What may be included in a Psychiatric Advanced Directive?

- My wellness factors - what helps keep me healthy.
- What therapies have worked for me in the past.
- Other pertinent medical conditions I have, such as, hypertension or diabetes.
- What medications have worked for me in the past.
- What medications should be avoided because of past experience.
- What are the signs and symptoms of my mental illness, and what may trigger a relapse.
- Consent or refusal to use Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT).
- Instructions for health care staff as to what is most helpful for my recovery.
- With whom you may share information about my health.
- Who will care for my children, pets and personal business while I’m ill.
- The name of a trusted person, excluding my doctor or care providers, who will speak for me when I’m incapable (health care agent or proxy).

What are the benefits to having a Psychiatric Advanced Directive?

- Empowerment to take control of my own health.
- Improved communication between my doctors, therapists, my family and me.
- More timely interventions when I’m not well.
- Improved continuity of care among my health care providers.
- Fewer psychiatric crises.
- Better management of crises if/when they do occur.
- Less chance of involuntary hospitalization.

How is a Psychiatric Advanced Directive written and followed?

- Written when I am healthy and capable of making choices for my own treatment.
- Witnessed by two adults who are not relatives or care providers, then notarized.
- Given to my physician and other mental health care providers.
- Takes effect only when I’m determined incapable by my physician or psychiatrist plus another physician.
- Clinicians may decline the instructions if they are medically unsound, illegal or impossible because of hospital or insurance limitations.

Resources:

Sample PAD form: <http://www.nrc-pad.org/images/stories/PDFs/ohiopadform.pdf>

National Resource Center on Psychiatric Advanced Directives: www.nrc-pad.org

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