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## April 2011 LifeSolutions Corner

*My 80-year-old dad is about to have major surgery and I hope everything will turn out fine. I just realized that we have never talked about what he wants and I don't know what to do if things don't turn out well.*

- ◆ *Would he want to be kept alive on life support?*
- ◆ *How does he feel about hospice care?*
- ◆ *What about a feeding tube?*

*I don't even know if he has a living will. I'm thinking I should talk with him and my mom about these end-of-life issues, but I have no clue where to begin or how to do it. Is this something that LifeSolutions can help with?*

Yes. First, I want to congratulate you for beginning to think about having this conversation with your parents. It's a tough subject to deal with. Most of us don't like to think about our own death or the death of a loved one. But it is important for you to know what level of care your parents want if they would become too ill to make decisions for themselves. And you need to talk about these things before a crisis occurs, so that (1) your loved one can identify his/her wishes for medical treatment and (2) you and the rest of your family won't have to wonder if the decisions you make are the ones that your father or mother would have made.

Here are some ideas to consider as you plan this kind of conversation:

- ◆ **Ask permission to have the conversation.**
  - Asking (rather "demanding" or "commanding") assures your loved ones that you will respect and honor their wishes.
- ◆ **Select an appropriate setting.**
  - Choose a private, quiet, comfortable place — free from distraction.
- ◆ **Know what to expect.**
  - Allow your loved one to set the pace. If he or she resists having the discussion, that's normal. Don't be surprised or discouraged; try again later.
- ◆ **Be a good listener.**
  - Acknowledge your loved one's right to make life choices — even if you don't agree with them.
  - Remember these conversations can be emotional. Sadness and even tears are okay. That does not mean that they do not want to talk about the subject. If you are still unsure, ask — "Is it okay that we keep talking about this?"

After you have this conversation, the next step is putting those wishes in writing ... developing what is called "advance directives." Advance directives are important because they outline what someone wants and doesn't want as medical treatment for life-threatening illnesses. Living wills are part of advance directives but it is just as important to designate an agent — someone to make health care decisions for them when they can't make them for themselves.

And yes, *LifeSolutions* can assist with these end-of-life issues in a number of ways.

- ◆ Our counselors can help you prepare to talk with your loved one about end-of-life choices.
- ◆ Through our *WorkLife* services, you have available 30 minutes of free legal consultation to help you discuss advance directives.
- ◆ The *LifeSolutions* website has information on palliative care, hospice, care giving, advance directives, and having end-of-life conversations with loved ones.
- ◆ Call us at 1.800.647.3327 or go online at [www.lifesolutionsforyou.com](http://www.lifesolutionsforyou.com). Click on the *WorkLife* log in and enter your company code. (If you don't know it, call 1.800.647.3327.) Locate Site Search on the right side and type in "end of life" or "advance directives." Check the middle of the screen for categories of resources.

The **UPMC Day of Conversation** is another resource for learning more about conversations regarding future health care decisions and about completing advance directives.

- ◆ It's held in conjunction with National Healthcare Decisions Day. More information about National Healthcare Decisions Day can be found at their website, [www.nhdd.org](http://www.nhdd.org).
- ◆ The UPMC Day of Conversation will take place on Saturday, April 16, from 9 a.m. to noon at the Herberman Conference Center, UPMC Cancer Pavilion, UPMC Shadyside.

Source: *Talking with Others about Their End-of-Life Wishes*, National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, [www.caringinfo.org](http://www.caringinfo.org)

Nothing in this information is a substitute for following your company policies related to information covered here.

