

What are the benefits of Advance Care Planning?

“Why do I need to do Advance Care Planning?”

Advance Care Planning is not compulsory, but it has benefits.

The first benefit is that it can ensure that if someone needs to make decisions on your behalf, then it is a person you trust to make the decisions that you would want. (Not the decisions that they would want)

Many people will be doing Advance Care Planning without knowing it has this name. We often talk to our family about what makes life worth living and situations in which we would not want to keep living.

However, Advance Care Planning is not just about life and death decisions. A good example that you may have heard about is that some people have a religious belief against receiving a blood transfusion. If they are having surgery, they will want the surgeon to keep them well using means other than a blood transfusion. If the worst happened, and the only way to survive was a blood transfusion, they would not want this.

The law supports them in this and says that the doctors must not give a blood transfusion when the patient has refused.

Other people will have a view that life is sacred, and they want any treatment that can save their life – they may prefer to live even if they can't move around or think for themselves.

Most people will have a middle position that says, “I want to stay alive and well, but there have to be some limits”. There are points at which I would say, “Stop treating me and let nature take its course”.

We assume that our family will automatically know what we would want – but they don't always. Talking to them is a good start to help them know what is important to you.

Making decisions for another person can be very stressful. People worry about making the 'right decision' when they haven't spoken to the person. A common reason people do Advance Care Planning is to help their children, so that if their children have to make decisions, the children can feel confident about what Mum or Dad would want.

In the past, medicine was less complex, and medical decisions were clearer to those making them. Now, there can be very difficult decisions to make, and sometimes they need to be made in a hurry. Sometimes, there will be no time to speak with the Medical Treatment Decision Maker or family. In this situation, doctors will treat you unless they know you don't want that treatment.

“I will always feel guilty that I might have made the wrong decision for my Mum.

I don't want my children to feel like this when they have to make decisions for me.”

Most of the information contained in these pages is equally relevant to patients/ consumers, family members, and health professionals. A small amount of additional information is provided specifically for those working in Residential Aged Care Facilities or for Health Professionals, including General Practitioners.