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Baby Boomers Should Plan Ahead for Late-in-Life Care

Baby boomers rocked Woodstock, protested wars, allied for civil rights and today have a solid reputation as professionals who work hard and play harder. But as record numbers of boomers continue to age, their health problems rise in direct proportion. If you're a member of this generation and haven't yet made decisions about your late-in-life health care, someone else could make them for you.

Without explicit, documented directions about how you want your health care and end-of-life issues handled, decisions about your care will fall to someone else if you become ill and are unable to make your wishes known. Having an advance care plan will give you peace of mind, secure in the knowledge that your health care choices will be respected, even if you can't communicate them.

An advance care plan ensures your care is customized to reflect your personal preferences and health needs, as well as any social, cultural or religious requirements. The Heart Failure Society of America has compiled information to explain the benefits of advance care planning that is helpful not only for those with a chronic condition, such as heart failure, but for anyone planning ahead for the future. Important terms to know when beginning advance care planning include:

- **Advance care directive:** This document provides clear evidence of your wishes regarding treatment and can include a living will, a durable health care power of attorney and a statement about organ donation..
- **Do-not-resuscitate order:** This directive made by you (or your family, in consultation with the doctor) tells doctors, nurses and rescue personnel what they should or should not do when a person stops breathing or when their heart stops. A DNR order can also include instructions on whether or not to use different methods to revive a person.
- **Living will:** This legal document allows a person who is unable to participate in decisions about their medical care to express their wishes about life-sustaining treatment. A living will is typically used during a terminal illness when a person is unable to communicate. Through it, you can set limits on what medical treatments -- such as CPR, blood transfusions, surgery, kidney dialysis or other invasive measures - you will allow.
- **Health care power of attorney:** This document allows someone you designate to make all health care decisions for you in the event you're unable to make them for yourself. This includes the decision to refuse life-sustaining treatment. You can give someone a general power of attorney or limit their decision making to certain issues by including instructions about your care.
- **Financial plan:** If you and your family have concerns about paying for medical care or hospital bills, a financial plan can help you work out the issues and provide for your family in the event of your death.

Talk to a health care professional about where to find further information about advance care planning as well as to discuss various health care options. You may also wish to consult a lawyer to help ensure your plan meets state legal requirements and your individual wishes. While it may be a difficult discussion, be sure your family knows and understands your wishes for care. Discussing the issues in advance will make implementing them easier should it become necessary. This advice is even more important if your have parents or older relatives who have not yet taken these steps. Please share these ideas with those you love.

For more information on advance care planning, visit the Heart Failure Society of America's patient education Web site at www.AboutHF.org.

Courtesy of ARAcontent

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