

April 16 is National Advance Care Planning Day

By Angus Campbell

Canadians are becoming increasingly aware of Advance Care Planning but what exactly is it, why is it significant, and what are the implications for caregivers?

Advance Care Planning is thinking about what your wishes would be if you were unable to speak for yourself. The Plan will include your preferences for health care, personal care, and end-of-life care. It involves considering what is important to you, deciding who you want to speak on your behalf, discussing those wishes with family and medical personnel, and documenting your requests.

With an Advance Care Plan, it is more likely your end-of-life wishes will be followed, and your family will have less stress and anxiety. You and your family will probably be more satisfied with your care, perhaps because of fewer end-of-life medical interventions, resulting in a better quality of life and death.

Caregivers may have to create Advance Care Plans for themselves and their care recipient. It's important for both parties to let their wishes be known, and we must also be prepared if something should happen to the caregiver. This applies to seniors, adult children looking after seniors, and aging parents of disabled children.

There are five steps to Advance Care Planning.

1. **THINK** about what's important to you – your values and beliefs.
2. **LEARN** about your health and what various treatment options really mean.
3. **DECIDE** who will speak for you, who your Substitute Decision Maker will be who can advocate for your care.
4. **TALK** to family, your Substitute Decision Maker, and your doctor to keep everyone informed.
5. **RECORD** your wishes for care and treatment in the form of a document or a video.

Free Advance Care Planning presentations are delivered by the Nova Scotia Hospice and Palliative Care Association (www.nshpca.ca) and by the Retired Teachers Organization (rto.nstu.ca). The Nova Scotia Advance Care Planning workbook is available online at <https://tinyurl.com/y72yc2he>. Caregivers Nova Scotia also offers a workshop specifically for family and friend caregivers.

Creating an Advance Care Plan is a process that takes time, thought, and personal reflection. It includes accurate, informed decisions that require frank conversations with family and friends.

Reach out to the above organizations to see how they can help you. You can also give us a call at Caregivers Nova Scotia toll-free at 1.877.488.7390 or www.CaregiversNS.org, and we will be happy to assist you.

Angus Campbell is the Executive Director of Caregivers Nova Scotia Association. He sits on the Board of Directors of the Canadian Frailty Network and of the Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care Association.