A Brief Guide to Advance Directives in the Primary Care Setting
What is an Advance Directive (AD)?

- Also known as a living will, or durable power of attorney for healthcare
- Explains patient’s wishes for medical treatment
  - Can be as extensive as desired
  - Most important to name a healthcare agent
    - May be anyone except for patient’s healthcare provider
    - Should know patient well and discuss wishes with agent
- In Vermont:
  - Short form and long form available
  - Can be any format (any witnessed & signed document is legal in VT)
  - Must be witnessed by two people not related to you (no notary necessary)
- Can be revoked or altered at any time
Why do Advance Directives Matter?

- Provides patients with control over their healthcare choices
- Initiates a conversation about goals of care
- University of Vermont Medical Center identified increasing AD utilization as a quality measure
- There’s no hierarchy of surrogates in Vermont
- ADs have the potential to:
  - Decrease healthcare costs
  - Reduce burdens on caretakers/family
Who needs an Advance Directive?

- “Everybody over the age of 18. This is not about death and dying, it is about affirming choices and affirming life. Remember, the three most famous cases in medical ethics were young women in their 20s.”

--Sally Bliss, MSB, RN
Clinical Ethicist, UVMMC
Chair of the Vermont Ethics Network Board of Directors
Ensuring Quality Patient Care

“So much of what we do is to extend life. A lot of people don’t understand that they can decide to limit treatment. The more planning you do, the less guilt your loved one will have doing the things you wished”

--Michael Sirois, M.D.
Family Medicine Physician

- ADs limit treatment, not care
- Providers are legally and morally obligated to abide by patient wishes as outlined in an AD
Cost

- Healthcare costs increase exponentially in last year of life*
  - Does this increase quality of life?
  - Is this consistent with the patient’s goals?

- Advance Directives (ADs) may decrease costs by limiting expensive interventions when not desired by patients

What should patients do with their AD?

- No legal requirements
- Copies should be given to:
  - Family
  - Physician and hospital
  - Vermont Advance Directive Registry
DNR/COLST

- **Do not resuscitate (DNR)**
  - Legal order to withhold cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and/or advanced cardiac life support (ACLS)
  - Only applies to interventions involving intubation/CPR

- **Clinician orders for life-sustaining treatment (COLST)**
  - More extensive; includes DNR

- **DNR/COLST must be completed by a clinician**
  - Unlike an AD, this is a physician order

- **Honored in the field (if readily available)**
Limitations of Advance Directives

- Advance directive is a legal document, but not a physician order
- ADs are not honored outside the hospital
  - DNR/COLST orders are
- We have to be able to access it to honor it
- If out-of-state, may be required to conform to state laws
- Some states will not honor in pregnant, permanently ill, or comatose patients (not the case in Vermont)
Accessing the Registry

- Apply to registry for access code*
- In the hospital, patient placement services handles all registry access for patients without capacity to engage
- In primary care setting, easiest to have one access code for the practice with a designated person

Complete your own Advance Directive!

- Important for everyone to have one
  - Doesn’t need to be the long form—just indicate a healthcare agent

- Increases familiarity and comfort with process

- Wellness measure
  - Receive $35 for completion
Take Home Points

- **Who’s your person?**
  - Everyone needs an AD
  - Limit treatment, *not* care
  - Many resources are available to help patients
    - But they need to be aware (that’s where you come in!)
  - As useful as ADs are, they do have limitations
  - Primary care offices should be the keepers of ADs!
Resources for Patients

- Community health team social worker
- Vermont State
  - [http://healthvermont.gov/systems/advance-directives](http://healthvermont.gov/systems/advance-directives)
- Vermont Ethics Network
  - [http://www.vtethicsnetwork.org/decisions.html](http://www.vtethicsnetwork.org/decisions.html)
- University of Vermont Medical Center
  - [https://www.uvmhealth.org/medcenter/Pages/Patients-and-Visitors/Patients/Advance-Directives.aspx](https://www.uvmhealth.org/medcenter/Pages/Patients-and-Visitors/Patients/Advance-Directives.aspx)
- Clinical Ethics Consultation Service
  - [https://www.uvmhealth.org/medcenter/pages/Departments-and-Programs/Clinical-Ethics.aspx](https://www.uvmhealth.org/medcenter/pages/Departments-and-Programs/Clinical-Ethics.aspx)
- UVMMC health library (step-by-step instructions on completing an AD)
  - [https://www.uvmhealth.org/Pages/eHealth/HealthwiseContent/Default.aspx?hid=aa114595](https://www.uvmhealth.org/Pages/eHealth/HealthwiseContent/Default.aspx?hid=aa114595)
Thank you!