Most adults have not documented their wishes for medical care in the event that a life-or-death situation arises and they cannot speak for themselves. In fact, many have not talked with their loved ones about what they would want and not want done, or even thought through these issues systematically. All of this is well established. Less well known is that recent advances in technology offer valuable resources for helping people think about, discuss, and document their wishes before an emergency happens—a process known as advance care planning (ACP).

ACP Resources - A Background

The most basic and accessible resources for ACP are online forms that designate a medical spokesperson, also known as a surrogate decision-maker. By a process known as assigning “healthcare power of attorney,” individuals authorize another person to make medical decisions on their behalf in the event that the individual loses decision-making capacity. Other online resources for ACP include “living will” forms that allow people to explain under what circumstances they would want life-sustaining medical treatment—such as mechanical ventilation, kidney dialysis, or a feeding tube—and when they would not. Many of these online resources provide brief, written explanations of various medical treatments and what they involve. But because many people have little familiarity with the reality of serious medical illness, these kinds of ACP tools may not help individuals accurately represent what they would really want in a medical crisis.
Challenges That Lie Ahead

A number of challenges remain for realizing the potential of e-ACP. First, though readily available, many people do not access these resources without prompting and reminders. Second, ACP documents are only valuable to the extent that their contents are known and readily available when needed. Third, because people and their preferences change over time, ACP needs to be structured so individuals can easily revisit these important issues and update their documents.

Integrated e-ACP has the potential to address these challenges. A recent meta-analysis showed that structured communication tools for ACP increase “the frequency of ACP discussions,… completion of advance directives,… and concordance between the care desired and the care received by patients.”1 Moving forward, the key will be to motivate people to engage in integrated e-ACP so its benefits can be realized.

Reference: Oczkowski, SJ. 2016, PLOS ONE DOI:10.1371/journal.pone.0150671

Technology in Advance Care Planning

The benefits of using technology for advance care planning purposes is unquestionable. At Vital Decisions, not only do we have Master’s level Specialists engaging over 30,000 patients each year in the Advance Care Planning process, but we also have an on-line patient engagement platform designed to help further improve the Advance Care Planning process.

Vital Decisions’ tool, called My Living Voice, educates and motivates members to become shared decision makers about both their current and future health needs. By integrating our technology tool, interpersonal and family interventions, members in the Vital Decisions program receive a comprehensive Personal Advance Care Plan that can be updated and changed as their health and wishes change.

For more in depth insights into The Use of Technology in Advance Care Planning or to speak with us on how our technology tool can help your organization, call 800-301-3984 or submit your info here: www.vitaldecisions.net/ACPtechnology.

How integrated ACP tools function as true decision aids:

1. They break down complex decisions into more manageable components.
2. They identify inconsistencies and incompatibilities in stated values and goals.
3. They apply the individuals values/goals to foreseeable clinical situations.
4. They translate this information into practical advance directives that surrogates and health care providers can use when decisions must be made.