

Patient Choices Vermont

A Vermont Patient's Guide to End-of-Life Choices & Decision-making

If your doctor has informed you that you have a terminal illness with six months or less to live, you have certain decisions about choices available to you.

- If you haven't already done so, you should execute an Advance Directive, which is a document that specifies what care you do or do not want to receive if you are not capable of communicating your wishes. Forms are available on the Vermont Department of Health website: http://healthvermont.gov/vadr/documents/AD_attachmentA.pdf
- The Advance Directive is activated only if you become incapable of making your own medical decisions. Then the person you designated to be your Health Care Agent will ensure that your wishes, as expressed in your Advance Directive, are followed.
- You should discuss with your doctor when or whether to enter a Hospice program.
- As long as you are deemed capable of making your own health care decisions, you are in charge and have certain rights:
 - You may choose to have every possible means or interventions to keep you alive;
 - You may specify which medical procedures may be used;
 - You may choose to have no more medical procedures;
 - You may fill out and post in your home a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order (signed by your physician) – also called a COLST (Clinician Order for Life Sustaining Treatment);
 - You may decide to voluntarily stop eating and drinking (VSED) which will result in death usually within days or a few weeks;
 - You may ask to receive medication to alleviate pain and anxiety;
 - You may choose to use Act 39 – Vermont's Death with Dignity law – that gives you the option to receive a prescription to end your life when you so choose; the entire process takes a minimum of 17 days.

To use Act 39, you must:

1. State your request to your physician,
2. Write your request, and
3. Confirm this request after a 15-day waiting period.

Both your own and a second consulting physician must determine that you

- a. Have a terminal illness with 6 months or fewer to live,
- b. Are competent to make your health care decisions,
- c. Are under no external pressure to end your life,
- d. Are a Vermont resident, and
- e. Can self-administer the life-ending medication.

The forms to be completed are available on the website of the Vermont Health Department:

http://healthvermont.gov/family/end_of_life_care/patient_choice.aspx#forms

If your doctor does not wish to assist you with the Act 39 process, or if you or your doctor have any questions or need advice, call the State Director of Compassion and Choices Vermont, 802-881-3189.